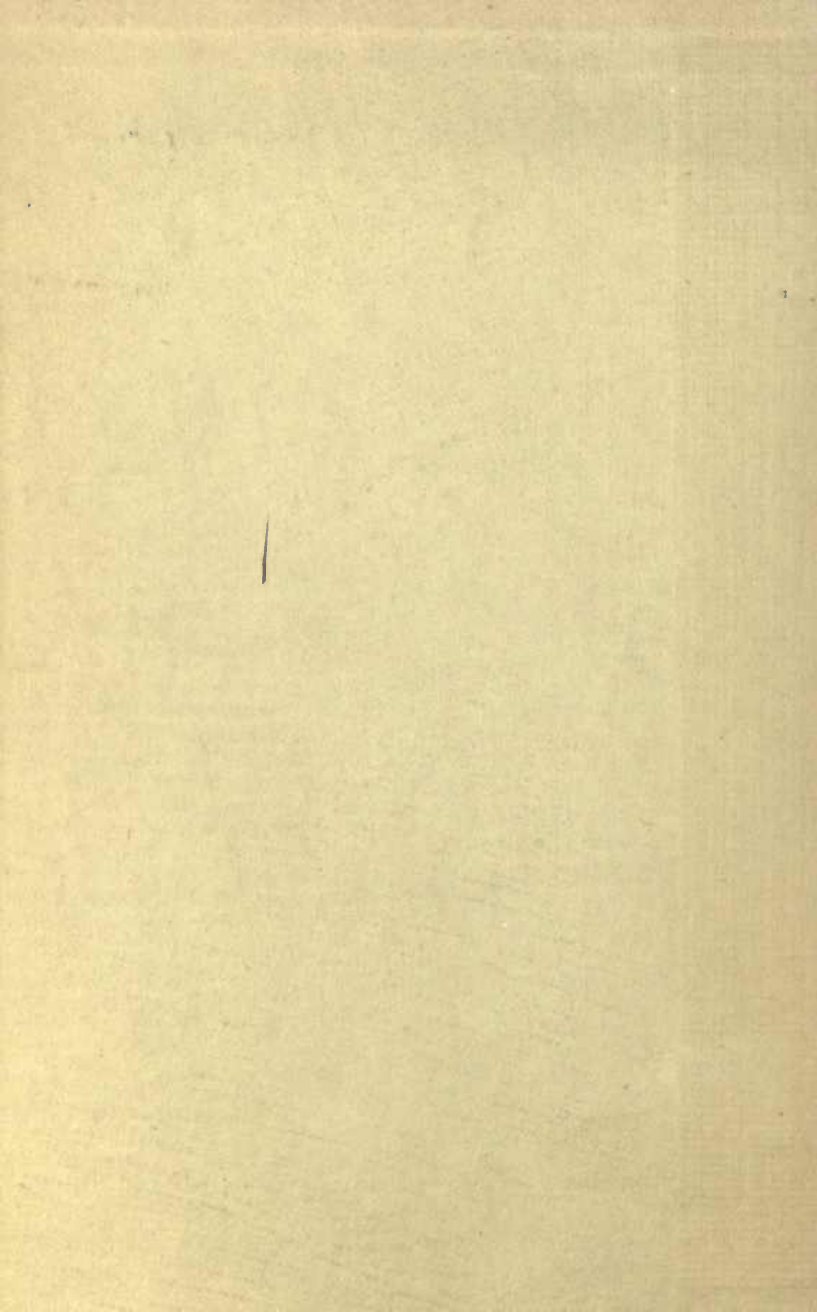


SLANDER

**ARTHUR SOMERS
ROCHE**



~~45~~

SLANDER

UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY. LOS ANGELES

SLANDER

Arthur Somers Roche.

SLANDER

Chapter I

THE girl leaned forward and knocked on the glass.
"I said 'Washington Square,' " she called.

The car skidded dangerously on the wet pavement as the taximan twisted in his seat.

"Doncha s'pose I know my way around, lady?" he demanded.

As if to show his contempt for a person so stupid as not to know that there was more than one way to a destination, he stepped on the accelerator. The machine slued; above her own cry of quick terror Martha heard the crunch of crushing metal. Then, hardly aware of how she got there, she found herself standing on the sidewalk, too frightened and angry to berate the reckless taximan.

The drizzle that had been a contributing cause of the accident dripped disconsolately from the boughs of the forlorn trees that bordered this square which was not Washington Square. She felt a great drop strike her neck. Three hundred dollars' worth of evening wrap; one hundred and fifty dollars' worth of frock; eighteen dollars' worth of gold slippers would be ruined in two minutes of rain.

She took a step toward the taxi; better the risks of a driver who was perhaps drunken than the ruin of clothing too costly to be easily replaced.

But the skid that had deposited the taxi against the curb had put it out of commission for the while. The right front wheel was broken in two. She had been too bewildered to note that it listed so perilously that only a miracle kept it semi-upright. She turned in dismay as another great drop splashed against her cheek.

Under her breath she damned the Gleasons as heartily as, in an unsubdued voice, the taximan cursed the weather, the machine, and the stupidity of female passengers who interfered with a man's driving.

Why had the Gleasons given a party in the city in July? Simply because they had just finally completed the alterations to their penthouse, they had to ask two hundred people to dine and dance and sup and drink. And two hundred idiots, of whom Martha Blaisdell was one, had foregone long week-ends in the country to spend Friday night with people whose only attraction was their money.

But, if she had to be an idiot, why couldn't she have been content to be one in a mild way? Why, if she was bored with the party, and couldn't endure another moment of it, did she assume that it would be an unkindness to accept the proffered escorts of half a dozen men? Every one of them was probably as anxious to leave the party as she was. Yet, instead of riding comfortably to Washington Square in somebody's car, she had to engage a taxi-

man who couldn't drive and who didn't know the city, and now she was caught in the rain, in a strange part of the town, late at night, with no other taxi in sight.

She looked despairingly about her. There were lights in various windows of these old-fashioned houses, but what would the dwellers within think if a young woman rang a bell and demanded shelter? Despite her annoyance, her lips curved in a mischievous smile. It would be fun to do it. Whoever opened the door would probably take her for some bobbed-hair bandit. Then her smile hardened into decision. There was a door, already opened, and light poured from it. She gathered her skirts in her hands and ran across the sidewalk and up the stoop.

For a second she hesitated, glancing at the sign, faintly illuminated by an electric bulb.

"St. John's Clinic," she read.

She shrugged and pushed wider the door that was slightly ajar. She looked into a tiny vestibule, and beyond that into a room that apparently occupied most of the ground floor. It was long and narrow, and filled with plain chairs, that crowded right down to a low platform on which stood another plain chair and a flat desk. And at this desk sat a man. A light burned above his head, and she saw that his hair was fiery-red, untidy, as though each separate strand rebelled against order. Freckles crowded his face, making somehow, even at this distance, the blue of his eyes more noticeable.

He looked up from the book which he was reading.

"And what particular ailment do you think you have?" His words were brusque but there was a warmth in his tones that seemed to belie his choice of words. "Come, come, Madam. It's nearly midnight and even a physician must go to bed some time. I suppose it's a baby, eh? You ladies who call so late at night are usually in some sort of trouble. Well, well, out with it."

She got a queer impression of gentleness striving to be harsh. And as she stepped into the long room a light above her head enabled him to see her clearly. Her dress, her manner, her very being warned him instantly of his mistake. This was no charity patient, come at the last moment for aid.

"My taxi broke down. I slipped in from the rain," said Martha.

The young man sighed—with relief, she thought.

"I just didn't see how I could prescribe for another person tonight," he said. As he spoke he grinned infectiously. "But I was about to prescribe a breath of air for myself. So—if you like—I'll take you home in my car."

"I couldn't dream of troubling you," she protested.

"Trouble me? It would be a godsend. To spend five minutes with someone who wasn't in trouble, wasn't sick, miserable——"

"You talk as if you didn't like your profession. You *are* a doctor, aren't you?"

"I love it," he said. "But there are times, late at night,

when a man's tired—I'm Peter Baxter," he finished brusquely.

"I'm Martha Blaisdell," she said.

He stood beside her now, and she was conscious of his angular strength. She was to witness an exhibition of it instantly, for the taximan had now followed her inside.

"Hey, you," he said. "Oh, you're here. I thought maybe you'd ducked out a side door. Say, my machine's all busted and you made me do it, knocking on the window, and I want fifty bucks."

He'd been drinking, Martha was sure now. She shrank away from him. But Peter Baxter reached out a bony hand.

"The lady owes you nothing," he said. "On your way—quick."

The taximan winced beneath the grip on his shoulder. He wiggled loose and ran. Martha smiled.

"Do you meet all problems as masterfully?" she asked.

The doctor grinned gayly at her.

"Most difficulties, of whatever sort, require nothing but a little firmness," he said. "My car's at the curb."

The rain had ceased now. Martha walked across the sidewalk to a cheap little coupe. The taximan stood muttering to himself. Dr. Baxter handed him something. The taximan's mutterings became fervent thanks.

"You don't practice what you preach," said Martha, as she settled herself in the little car. "And I want to give you what you gave him."

"I'll put it on my first bill," he laughed.

"Oh, you expect me as a patient?"

He shook his head.

"I don't think so. I wouldn't want your kind of patient, anyway. You'd have nothing but silly nerves, due to idleness or laziness or dissipation of one sort or another."

"You're rather rude," she said.

"Rather honest," he replied.

He amused her.

"That ought to be a novelty to a person like you," he said.

"What do you mean by a person like me?" she demanded.

"Really want to know?" Her silence encouraged him. "Well, I mean a girl with too much money, too little to do—there'd be absolutely no excuse whatsoever for a person like you being ill."

"That's absurd. Idleness hasn't anything to do with money, has it?"

"Lack of it often has," he said. "But generalities aren't true, of course. Still—there'd be little excuse for illness in your case. You're strongly-built, healthy-appearing——"

"Some men have even said beautifully made, lovely-appearing——"

"Have they? How nice of them," he scoffed.

"I think," she blazed, "you're a boor."

"I guess I am," he amiably admitted.

The carelessness of his agreement tickled her. She laughed amusedly.

"Perhaps I'm not nice to quarrel with a stranger who does me a favor?" she said.

"Perhaps you're not," he grinned.

She suddenly decided that she liked him. A character, of course. And not, she also decided, too unpresentable. There was something attractive about his very homeliness. The blue eyes were gay, and the wide mouth was sympathetic.

"You—run a charity clinic?" she asked.

He nodded.

"And give lectures to my patients. You know—diet, care of the body—all the hundred and one things that ought to be taught in school, that every civilized person should know, but that so few do."

She felt her way cautiously, wondering at her own curiosity.

"It's a municipal institution?"

"Lord, no. I—that happens to be my house. My family have lived in St. John's Square for generations. I decided to practice medicine in the neighborhood where I was born. That's all. And—well, times are hard, and—it isn't all charity work. Those who *can* pay—pay. Those who can't—" He shrugged.

"It must be terribly interesting," she said.

"Do you *have* to say that?" he demanded. "You

know—you couldn't possibly imagine anything duller."

"Then why do you do it?" she asked.

"Me? I don't find it dull. I mean that you would."

"And how do you know so much about me?" she inquired.

He glanced at her. She had a feeling that until this moment he hadn't really taken her in, that she was merely a woman, and that her youth and beauty and charm had been completely lost on him.

"The type is common enough," he said dryly.

"I think you're insufferable," she said.

"But you," he smiled, "are an uncommon example of that type."

She laughed. It was extraordinary, she thought, that his very brusqueness had charm. And he had twisted, quite deftly, an unflattering estimate of her into a quasi-compliment.

The car slid to the curb in front of her apartment on Washington Square.

"I—thank you," she said.

"It was fun," he said.

"And I want to pay what you gave the taximan," she said. She fumbled in her evening bag. "If it's over a dollar," she said doubtfully, "you'll have to wait until I run upstairs——"

"A dollar covers it," he said.

"That isn't true," she charged. "That taximan wouldn't have been so pleased with a dollar. If you'll wait—I'll bring it around sometime soon."

"I might even call," he suggested.

She eyed him. This was no pushing young man. Then she shook her head.

"I'd rather drop in on your clinic. I'd—like to see what goes on."

"Any old thrill at all if it's a thrill, eh?" he said.

"I'm afraid," she said slowly, "you *are* bad-mannered."

And upon that she swept across the sidewalk. Crude, uncouth, ugly man. Yet, oddly, she was smiling as she rode up in the elevator.

Chapter II

TRUDIE LEMMING eyed her husband anxiously.

"Did you talk to Martha?" she asked.

Big Bob Lemming nodded.

"I gave her a hint or two about her investments," he said. "Martha's not dull. She knew what I meant. You say anything to her?"

"It's so *hard*," replied Trudie. "You can't walk up to a person like Martha Blaisdell and say to her that everyone is talking. I beat around the bush and—well, like you, I think she's smart. I think she knows what I mean."

Lemming shrugged his wide shoulders.

"Sort of a delicate situation, isn't it? I think it's smart to keep quiet when you can't be definite. I don't see why we should have butted in at all. All the talk would die out bye and bye, anyway."

Trudie's soft lips hardened.

"It must die out *now*," she said. "Suppose Herbie hears about it?"

Lemming whistled; then he grinned.

"So *that's* it? Matchmaking, eh? Why, you silly thing, they never met each other until yesterday. And

Herbie—no woman could win him from his explorations.”

“No?” Trudie looked superior. “Shows how much you know, Bob.”

“You mean to say that Cranston is seriously taken with her?” her husband demanded.

“Why not?” she retorted.

“Oh, she’s lovely and all that—but *Herbie*. He’s the typical confirmed old bachelor.”

“They make the best husbands,” said Trudie.

“If they’re caught,” admitted Lemming.

“Martha’ll catch him—if she wants him,” said Trudie, confidently. “Unless all this nasty talk gets to his ears. And I hope it doesn’t. If I’d heard it sooner, I’d have talked to her before this.”

“We’re her best friends,” said Lemming. “Naturally, it came to us last of all. Damn! People that spread scandal ought to be shot.”

“Especially when they ought to *know* it isn’t true,” said his wife. She fitted a piece into the jigsaw puzzle before her. “I think they need you at bridge,” she told him. “Insist on cutting in. It will give Herbie a chance to join Martha. She’s at the pool.”

Her husband smiled down at her.

“Who helped you catch me?” he asked.

He dodged the bit of the puzzle she threw at him, and went to the veranda. Millicent Cragin, the Dan Tremans and Herbert Cranston had just finished a rubber.

“Hey, doesn’t a host ever get a chance to win his money back?” Lemming demanded.

"Take my hand," said Cranston quickly.

And as he strolled, with an elaborate casualness that did not deceive anyone, toward the pool, Lemming made silent and motionless obeisance to his wife. That girl knew everything, sometimes before the event had really happened.

"I bid four spades," he loudly declared. It was an atrocious overbid, but he didn't want any comment on Cranston's swift departure toward the pool. Such comment would inevitably bring gossip in its train, and he wanted to hear none. The best way to stop scandal was not to listen, and not let anyone start it.

On the springboard resting from a sprint down the pool, stood Martha Blaisdell. Cranston, looking at her, decided that she was divine.

Only, divinity connoted something ethereal, something unapproachable, austere. Whereas this warm-blooded, laughing creature poised on the springboard was assuredly of flesh.

And so young! Last night in the dignity of evening dress she had seemed in the early twenties. This morning, on the golf course, in tweedy skirt and stout shoes, she had still seemed well out of her teens. But now, in the close-fitting scanty garb she wore, she seemed not a day over nineteen.

Slim but not thin, tall enough to lend her exquisite proportions dignity, she was quite the loveliest thing Cranston had ever seen. Her black hair and violet eyes were so exactly suited to her creamy skin, which the sun seemed

neither to tan nor redden; her nose was straight and her full lips, that hinted at obstinacy, were lovely when they melted into smiles. Her chin was round and pugnacious. All in all, the face showed character as well as beauty.

"Hey!" She waved a gay hand at him. "Tell me what on earth is wrong with this one-and-a-half."

She bounded from the board, revolved in the air, straightened out, and entered the water with hardly a splash. She came up, tossing her black hair.

"How was it?" she asked.

"Perfect," he replied.

"Honestly?"

"Cross my heart," he said solemnly.

She swam to the steps and climbed from the pool. She sat down on a stone bench and asked for a cigarette.

"Aren't we silly—all of us?" she asked. "Here am I, twenty-six years of age——"

"You aren't!" he exclaimed.

Her violet eyes widened.

"Aren't you nice? That was spontaneous. But I am, woe is me. And at twenty-six I'm concerned as to whether or not I dive properly. Could anything be more absurd?"

"I suppose that at such an advanced age one's mind should turn to contemplation of the past," he grinned. "But I know two old gentlemen in their seventies who carry private golf pros around the country with them, and scatter largesse when they break a hundred."

"But it is silly," she said. "What does anyone care how they dive or play golf?"

"The desire to excel," he began. But she cut him short.

"But in *games*. In useless things. I mean—I'm ashamed of myself. I find myself diving, not for the fun of the water, for the excitement of shooting through the air, but for the purpose of doing it well. Now that's stupid."

"I think you're harsh to yourself," he protested. "If you take pleasure in doing something, isn't that enough to justify doing it?"

She shook her head. Drops of water flew from her hair. Cranston thought he'd never seen so unselfconscious a girl. Most girls, emerging from the water, are concerned enough about their appearance to smooth their hair, at least, if they haven't worn bathing caps. But not Martha Blaisdell. But, of course, one could not be as lovely as she was without being aware of it, and certainty of anything makes for self-confidence.

"If the thing is worth while in itself," she argued. "You take pleasure in dashing off to South America and finding out why ancient Indians did such and such. But that's useful. It adds to the sum of human knowledge. But diving, or playing golf—I'd like to do something useful," she ended.

Despite her admission to twenty-six years—and Cranston could see now that she was not in her teens; even her lovely skin could not pretend in this afternoon sun and without cosmetics to such extreme youth—she was ridiculously young in her present mood.

"Beautiful things are useful," he reminded her.

"Oh-ho," she laughed. Her face, that had been serious, became animated with gayety. "So that's why you disappear for months at a time. To think up pretty speeches. Mr. Cranston, I thought you were above such matters. I didn't dream that the serious-minded explorer would descend to flirtation."

"Is it flirtation to remind a girl of something so obvious—that she is beautiful?"

"I should hope so," she smiled. "I'd hate to think that you weren't going to flirt with me. After all, I rate an *attempt*, don't I?"

"It would be nothing more than that," he said. "I'm sadly out of practice."

"Oh, really? Well, in that case I won't be offended if flirtation hadn't entered your head. What time is it?"

He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Nearly five."

"Gracious!" She slipped from the bench in panic. "I'm due in New York at seven, and this is Sunday night and the traffic will be terrible. And I haven't even arranged for anyone to take me into town."

"May I?" he asked.

She smiled.

"Could you avoid asking me after that hint? But weren't you spending the night here?"

He shook his head.

"I intended going in after dinner. But I'd so much rather go in now. Are you dining anywhere?"

She looked at him.

"Why—not exactly. That is—well, I couldn't dine with you—if you're asking me?"

"I'm doing that very thing," he said.

"But later," she suggested.

"My evening is at your disposal," he said.

"That makes me feel important. The celebrated Herbert Cranston, Park Avenue's only *doer*, offers me his evening."

"And I don't deserve derision for the offer," he said.

"Oh, my dear man!" She laid a damp palm on his wrist. "I was *flattered*. And—if you cared to call for me—about ten—or does that seem an outrageous hour to a man who probably rises at dawn, and tramps the jungle all day, and——"

"I'm off duty," he laughed. "There are no jungles to explore in Manhattan."

"Oh, aren't there?" she said. "Jungles and morasses and wild beasts and precipices—but if one doesn't see them—they don't exist, do they?"

"And I suppose you'll tell me that you see those things," he scoffed.

For a moment her violet eyes were almost black, as though some shadow from within obscured them.

"I wish I didn't, Mr. Cranston," she said. Then her eyes lightened. "You'd better go and see that your bags are ready. Mine are all prepared. They need only to be brought downstairs. I'll slip in and get dressed——"

At the far end of the pool were dressingrooms, and

without further words she ran toward them. Cranston, looking after her, wondered at the sudden impulse to follow her, to ask her what she meant by her talk of city dangers. But she was merely making conversation. So he shrugged his shoulders and strolled toward the house.

The bridge game on the veranda was breaking up. Millie Cragin hailed him mischievously.

"If it was interest when you went to the pool, what on earth is it now?" she demanded.

Mrs. Dan Treman chimed in.

"Martha in anything is glorious; in a bathing suit she is supernatural. Do you believe in miracles now, Herbie?"

"What a lot of small-town hicks you all are," he said. "If a man looks at a girl you all get together and clack, clack, clack—Where," he went on, "does a guest find his charming hostess?"

"Leaving?" demanded Millie.

Cranston stared at her.

"Because you'll find it out anyway—I'm driving Miss Blaisdell into town."

Millie reached out a hand and patted his.

"Always tell Aunt Millie everything, Herbie," she said. "Then she doesn't have to guess—and invent. You'll find Trudie in the library."

"Good lord, do Long Islanders have libraries? Do they read?" demanded Cranston.

"Certainly not. Aristocrats don't have to read. They

know all worth knowing. She's working on a jigsaw puzzle. I'll take you to her."

"Thanks," said Cranston dryly. "But you can tell her all about my taking Miss Blaisdell to town later on. I'll go by myself."

And as Millie giggled at him, he went to the library.

Trudie Lemming looked up from the table over which she bent.

"Lo, Herbie. Have you eyes? Can you find a T-shaped yellow piece for me?"

"If I could, Trudie, I'd refuse," he said. "You'd discover I had talent for your jigsaws, and keep me here, wearing out my eyes—I've had a swell time, Trudie, and you were an angel to ask me out. May I come again?"

"May you? Why, you grinning idiot, if you don't come out every week-end the rest of the summer—are you leaving? Thought you were staying until Monday."

"That's sweet of you, Trudie, but——"

"Okay, child. We're Folly-ing ourselves on Thursday night and want you to come."

"May I phone tomorrow? I've something or other cooked up for the middle of the week——"

"Phone it is," said Trudie. "And if you see that lazy lout of a husband of mine anywhere around on your way out, tell him that I said he was crazy when he said the border of this puzzle was black. It's the green that makes the border."

"I'll tell him," chuckled Cranston.

He was still smiling as he reached his room. Trudie Lemming was the most extraordinary wife he knew. Apparently careless, forgetful, she never overlooked anything in her extensive household. How she found time to compose the charming songs which were bringing her in considerable money as well as a reputation, no one could discover. She was never so busy that she couldn't drop everything to chat with a friend or dash off to see something or other. Apparently she paid no attention to Bob Lemming, her big and blundering husband, but Cranston, like everyone else, had noticed that at a dance Lemming spent most of his time with his wife, that wherever they were, the husband managed to get near the wife, and the wife near the husband, every few minutes. Trudie's only passion was the jigsaw puzzle, and she could put the pieces together with her eyes closed, it seemed. They couldn't be looking at the puzzle, because those snapping brown eyes saw everything, even as her ears heard everything.

Everyone adored the Lemmings. An ideal match. It must be fun, Cranston mused, to be part of an ideal marriage. To live with a girl whom you adored, who adored you, and with whom you were so congenial that you always gravitated toward each other, no matter where you were, what you were doing.

And what on earth had put such ideas into his crazy head, he suddenly asked himself. Marriage was all right for people like the Lemmings. Bob had a business that occupied his time, and kept him in New York. Oh, he

was rich enough to forget about it when he wanted, but it did give him a headquarters. It enabled him to settle down on Long Island. . . . Or, if he wanted to abandon business, he could take a house in Paris, a moor in Scotland. . . . But he hadn't adopted a career which demanded that he leave civilization behind for months at a time.

An explorer couldn't marry, or shouldn't. A fine husband he, Herbert Cranston, would make from some adoring little wife. In the middle of the honeymoon he'd get a wire from the British people, or maybe from Washington, asking what he thought of heading an expedition to the Himalayas. Having a considerable fortune, Cranston got more of those wires than almost anyone else. He could finance his own expeditions, in fact, preferred to do so.

You couldn't throw people down. After eight years of that sort of thing, you belonged to different societies, you read papers, you received—well, honors. Besides, it was your *career*. And a man had to do something in this world. A man couldn't idle his life away, simply because his parents had left him plenty of money. Oh, other men did. But he just couldn't.

No, he'd not think of marriage. Marriage was for idlers, or for workers who stayed put. It wasn't for him. And further, he hardly knew the girl.

For a moment he felt intense anger toward Martha Blaisdell. He'd had a pretty swell time since he came back

from this last trip to Brazil. The newspapers had been kind; there had been talk of a scroll of honor from Congress; Orken, the famous Dane, had invited him to spend November with him.

Why on earth should any girl intrude her puny charms into a man's masculine life? Then common sense ruled him. After all, Martha Blaisdell had never laid eyes on him until yesterday; she had shown him nothing but courtesy, the small courtesy that any nicely bred girl shows to a well-behaved man. If there'd been any intrusion it had been his, not hers.

So, when he joined her downstairs, he had banished his momentary illtemper. His car had been brought around and her bags, she informed him, were already stowed in the rumble. Millie Cragin and Mrs. Dan Treman strolled around the drive as Cranston assisted the girl into the machine. They said nothing, merely waved hands in farewell, but Cranston felt himself stiffen, felt his cheeks redden. Darn them, they'd shown up deliberately, merely to get his goat. And what an easily-gotten goat it was, he told himself. He would try to tether it more securely from now on.

Chapter III

ANY particular route?" he asked, as they shot into the main road.

She shook her head.

"One's the same as another. I have no bump of direction. I'd not make a success of exploring, would I?"

"Do you mind?" he asked.

She laughed.

"I know what you mean. The girl meets an author and says, 'I've always wanted to write.' Or an actor and says, 'I've always wanted to go on the stage.' But I really didn't mean that. I was just making idle talk."

"Well, it's the pleasantest kind of talk," he said.

"Only—one gets tired of it. It's so *samey*. But if one doesn't do anything, one can't talk of one's hobby or fad or career."

"Nothing could be duller than that kind of talk," he said.

"I guess you think so," she responded. "You haven't said one word about your Brazilian experiences."

"If you'd written eighty thousand words about something you'd feel an acute disinterest in the subject," he told her.

"Eighty thousand words! Think of having done some-

thing—anything—that would justify one writing that much about it.”

“I sometimes wonder if anyone has,” he said. “But I’d rather talk about you.”

“For eighty thousand words?” she asked, mischievously.

“If there are that many adjectives, their use would be justified,” he said.

She flashed him a glance from her violet eyes.

“A fast worker,” she commented.

He shrugged distastefully. Her perceptions were swift.

“You didn’t like that?”

“I don’t care much about the idea and less for the phraseology,” he replied.

“In other words—I’m a trifle cheap. Perhaps you’re right. Has anyone ever told you that you’re a bit of a prig, Mr. Cranston?”

He turned to look at her.

“I guess it’s about time someone did tell me,” he said slowly.

“And perhaps it was about time someone hinted that I was apt to be a trifle cheap,” she said, with equal gravity. Then amusement glinted in her eyes. “Are we going to be good for each other?”

“That would be pleasant,” he smiled. “Although I see no room for improvement in you—”

“Don’t withdraw,” she said. “I deserved it. So did you. Now, let’s forget it. You don’t want to talk about you—shall I talk about me?”

He laughed with genuine mirth.

"Please," he said.

When he deposited her at her apartment just off Washington Square he knew that she was not cheap. She merely was able to adapt herself to situations and circumstances. If a man were cheaply flirtatious, she could fence with him, and didn't bother to be offended because he didn't quite suit her taste. She had evidently—and justifiably perhaps—gathered that he was what she had termed a fast worker, and so she had endeavored to meet him on his own ground. She was like most of the girls one met nowadays, at ease with a bootlegger or a prince, and able to speak the language of either.

But she was more than that. She was a girl of extraordinary insight, of sophistication—in the kinder meaning—of humor, and what Cranston termed niceness. Her reactions to people and events were decent and candid. She was, he told himself, the sort of girl one would like one's sister to be, if one's sister were not satisfactory as she was.

She lived, he had discovered, quite alone. An orphan, he gathered that she had inherited money. Certainly the apartment building before which he stopped his car looked expensive enough, even if Washington Square was no longer as fashionable as the upper East Side.

That they had not met before was just one of those happenings. Debutante parties had ceased to interest him after his sophomore year, and when he was in New York,

she was in Santa Barbara or Antibes or Biarritz, and when she was in New York, Cranston was in South America or Labrador or some equally remote spot. Their trails simply hadn't crossed.

He helped her out of the car, saw that the doorman was competent to attend to her two bags, and left her with the understanding that he would call for her at ten, and they would go to the Ministry for dancing.

Martha Blaisdell looked after him as the car drove away, a queer expression in her violet eyes. Then, shrugging, she followed the doorman into the building and the elevator. At the fifth floor she alighted, and rang the bell at a door. It was opened instantly by a trim maid.

"Mr. Gerrish is here, ma'am," she greeted her mistress.

Martha frowned, but the frown was gone when she entered her pretty livingroom.

"Lo, Gerry," she said.

A man rose from a couch. He wore—a rare costume in these days—formal day clothing. Pin-striped trousers, a black semi-tailed coat, white edgings on his waistcoat; and a silk hat reposed on the hall stand.

"Hello, Martha," he said.

He advanced and held out a hand. The limpness of her grip made him drop her fingers instantly.

"You control your enthusiasm well," he remarked.

"Perhaps I don't feel any enthusiasm," she said.

"It's polite to feign it," he said.

"I don't feel polite," she said curtly.

"I can endure that so long as you will look beautiful," he said.

She made an impatient gesture with her lovely hands.

"Gerry, why must you always talk like a person in a book, and look like a character in a play?"

"Do I? The villain, perhaps?"

"Perhaps," she said.

She walked across the room and stood staring out a window.

"Something upset you?" he asked.

"I don't know. I guess so." She turned back and looked at him. "Gerry, did you ever tell anyone that—that—well, that you pay my bills?"

Beneath her steady gaze his pale face burned.

"That is a most extraordinary question, Martha," he said. With theatrical deliberation he sat down upon the couch. The case from which he selected a cigarette was too elaborate; the briquet he used was too ornate.

"The circumstances are extraordinary," she said.

"I think they must be," he said. The sarcasm in his voice left her unmoved.

"Trudie Lemming talked to me today. So did her husband."

"And what did they say?" His sarcasm bordered on a sneer now.

"They didn't say anything. They didn't need to. Other people—the glances—the word here and there—Gerry, answer my question."

"Martha, I'll forgive the insult. You're upset, nervous. You'll regret it tomorrow—tonight. I'll answer it. Of course not. There—does that satisfy you?"

"It does," she said. "Now, Gerry, will you please prepare an account of my holdings? Will you please submit a list of my indebtedness to you? Then, will you sell enough securities—"

"You're mad, Martha. I've advanced you money—as your father's man of business—and your own—might be expected to do. But to permit you to repay me now, when securities are selling at almost nothing—it would be ruin, Martha."

"Sell them," she said. She stared at him, as though he were something outside her experience, something she had never seen before. "Gerry, I've been wickedly foolish. I've been *afraid* to examine into my affairs, lest I find out that I have practically nothing. And so I've permitted you to advance me money, let myself get into a position where a vile man could lie about me. But that's over. Sell everything I have."

"But, Martha," he protested, "why on earth should I lie about you? My God, Martha, I'm in love with you. Does a man defame the woman he loves?"

"Some men do. Your kind of man," she replied. "Gerry, my father found you capable. I found you kind. So—you handled my affairs. And you met my friends. And you resented the fact that you knew them only through me. You were put up for clubs, invited to houses

where you wanted to be seen. But a climber isn't satisfied to climb. He must show, as instantly as he can, his superiority to some of the people in that very group which he is striving to know. He'll be contemptuous, as soon as he dare, of some man in that group who hasn't as much money as the climber has. And, if he possibly can, he'll involve himself in gossip with some girl in that group. Some mean pride in him is satisfied that way, and—"

"But, Martha! I've told you I loved you!"

"Have you told Mrs. Gerrish that?" she asked. "I didn't know you were divorced. I don't like married men to tell me they love me."

"But you know that Clara and I are separated, that I can have a divorce—"

She sighed suddenly, as though with great weariness.

"Gerry, must we go into it further? Do what I ask—sell my things, take out what I owe you, telephone me when it's done, and we can meet and have a final settlement——"

"But you can't dismiss me like this," he argued. "Good lord, Martha, I've served you faithfully, and—is this what I get?"

"This," she said, "is what you get, and it is less than you deserve, Gerry. Now—please go."

If she had raised her voice, if she had melodramatically thrown open the door, he would have been better able to meet the situation. But the very brevity of her accusa-

tion, the swiftness with which she had announced her verdict and pronounced judgment, gave her words a finality which he recognized. He would not be permitted to offer any defense because she had already decided upon his guilt.

There was, he very definitely knew, nothing to be gained by argument, so he walked abruptly from the room, and Martha, for the first time in years, burst into tears.

It was not easy to dismiss anyone from one's life; it was not pleasant to discover that a tolerable companion had turned out badly.

She heard, in a moment, the quiet footsteps of the maid in the diningroom. She sat up, dismayed lest her stifled sobs had been heard by the servant. But dishes were being laid upon the table, and if Seena had heard weeping she would have come in to investigate.

Martha rose from the chair and as she passed the diningroom door she averted her head. And she closed the bedroom door. She almost tore off the garments she had worn motoring into town. The mere near presence of Gerrish seemed to have soiled them. She felt unclean herself.

How dared he? How had he, to whom she had given a leg up, dared to insinuate things about himself and Martha Blaisdell? And he had. Oh, there was no remotest shadow of a doubt about that. One didn't need to put two and two together; the numbers put themselves together and added themselves up.

The incredible, unspeakable swine! She wished she were a man. There were some offenses which could be resented only by a blow, and Gerrish's had been of that sort.

She supposed, that in his way, he did fancy himself in love with her, too. The fact that he was willing—or eager—to marry her, would somehow justify him in his vileness. And she understood the reason for his action. It had been what she had told him. His type would consider that having an affair with a girl like Martha Blaisdell would be proof that he "belonged". She had known other climbers who behaved similarly. Gerrish would think that his acceptance as a lover by Martha Blaisdell would be proof that he was attractive. People couldn't say about a man who was having an affair with Martha Blaisdell that he didn't belong.

This was his reasoning, bizarre to normal people, but matter-of-fact to the climber.

Nevertheless, how *dared* he? To smirch her, who was so far removed from affairs that her kisses could have been counted on the fingers of her two hands.

And people were not charitable in these lax days. They were ready, if not eager, to believe the worst. Those who knew her really, would be sure that any gossip about her was false, but what about the casual acquaintances she possessed? What about new acquaintances?

She thought of Herbie Cranston. Involuntarily she smiled. "Herbie" was so inadequate a nickname for him. He deserved something more rugged, like "Jeff" or "Pat".

Nevertheless he was nice. In fact, he was possibly the nicest man belonging to that particular set of people with whom she played around.

Good-looking, too. She visualized him now. She liked the brick-burn on his face. Other men were burned or tanned, but their complexions were obviously acquired at play. One knew, instinctively, that Cranston's burn came from exposure in the line of some task or other. He had about him the look of the doer, rather than of the player.

Yet, in practically all externals he conformed. Martha liked unusual people, but she didn't like them to seem unusual. Cranston didn't. He belonged to the right clubs, went to the right houses, did the right things. She had observed him closely during this week-end at the Lemmings. Little incidentals, that even women do not notice at first, she saw. The way his ties blended with his shirts, the way his coats hung upon him, the kind of shoes he wore; nothing escaped her glance.

And she approved. Cranston was, most emphatically, the kind of man that her kind of girl ought to marry. Position, plenty of money, and a distinguished career that was quite out of the ordinary.

She wondered that he had not been caught by some predatory husband-hunter before this. It was, when you came right down to it, quite extraordinary. It wasn't as if Cranston were woman-shy. Not at all. On the contrary, while one couldn't term him flirtatious, he was willing to talk, eager to be friendly.

He liked her. He had paid her marked attention over this week-end. He would have taken her to dinner to-night if her engagement with Gerrish had not interfered. He was calling for her later. She wished that she had let him take her to dinner. His companionship would make her forget the scene with Gerry. But she had not hoped that she would be able to get rid of Gerry so soon.

Divesting herself of the last bit of clothing she walked into her bath, slipped a heavy towel over her head and stepped beneath the shower.

Yes, Cranston liked her. It shouldn't be hard to turn that liking of his into something much more ardent. She turned off the shower, shivering slightly, and rubbed herself dry. Back in her bedroom, she stopped in the middle of the act of pulling on a stocking.

Why not? Good-looking, not much over thirty, with position and money. What more could a girl ask?

It was about time she did some serious thinking about her future. Future? About the actual present. She had been content to drift, to accept advances from Gerald Gerrish—what a ridiculous name—until today, when she had learned that her broker had behaved too badly.

That ended Gerrish. She'd sell every last share of stock, impoverish herself, rather than be under obligation to him. But before she accepted that harsh alternative of poverty, it was as well to consider something else—marriage. And with a man like Cranston.

The maid knocked on the door.

"Dinner is served, ma'am," she announced.

"Be right there," Martha replied.

"And I forgot to tell you," added the maid, "that a gentleman called this afternoon. Dr. Baxter, he said his name was."

Blankly Martha stared at her reflection in the mirror. Then she shrugged faintly. So—Dr. Baxter *was* a pushing young man, after all.

Chapter IV

A PUSHING young man. But that wasn't quite fair to the young doctor of St. John's Clinic. She was in a mood that made her unjust to people. Gerry had, for the moment, prejudiced her against men. After all, even if she had said, when Baxter suggested calling, that she would prefer dropping in at his clinic, she hadn't definitely forbade him to call.

Still, it was presuming a bit on the slight service he had rendered her. Then she berated herself for her own attitude. Was she a snob? If Baxter had happened to be—well, somebody like Herbert Cranston, who knew all her friends, would she have thought it presumptuous of him to attempt to improve on a chance meeting? Then, why, because Baxter was an obscure charity physician, did she condemn him because he permitted himself an ordinary courtesy? She smiled as in her thoughts she used the word "courtesy." Certainly the young doctor had not shown himself overburdened with that quality the other night. Brusque to the point of rudeness he had been, rather.

Then, as she attacked her dinner with the frank appetite which was her healthy habit, she temporarily forgot her cavalier of St. John's Square. She brooded on Ger-

rish; she dallied with the mental image of Cranston; and after dinner she found herself possessed by a tremendous restlessness brought on by rage at her attorney and tremors aroused in her by the possibilities of Cranston.

She was listening to her radio when Seena came into the livingroom.

"Cook's got another spell, ma'am," said the maid.

Olga's "spells" were of fairly common occurrence, and were due to some obscure organic ailment. They were not dangerous, so Dr. Hartley, Martha's own physician, had decided, but they were decidedly uncomfortable and reduced the good-natured cook to a state of terror.

"Get Dr. Hartley," said Martha.

"He isn't in, ma'am," said Seena. "I telephoned and he was out and—and Olga is pretty bad this time, ma'am."

Martha went at once to the cook's room. Olga's vast bulk was writhing in her bed. Her mistress placed a hand on her forehead. The skin was hot and dry. And despite Hartley's apparent certainty that Olga's seizures were not dangerous, Martha felt quick alarm.

"But Dr. Hartley's assistant—couldn't you get him?" she asked Seena.

"He's off on some hurry call," replied the maid.

Olga groaned in anguish and Seena wrung her hands.

"Hadn't I better send to some hospital, ma'am?" she asked.

"Yes. Hurry," said Martha.

"What hospital, ma'am?" asked Seena.

"Good lord, I don't know. Ask the operator—no, I'll phone."

She raced into the livingroom and thumbed rapidly the pages of the telephone book. "Baxter, Peter, physician, St. John's Square."

She dialed the number and in a moment she heard the pleasant baritone of Baxter.

"This is Martha Blaisdell. My cook is ill. It's a kidney attack. Not dangerous but painful—very. Can you come right over? She'll need a morphine injection, and—"

"I'd rather diagnose the case myself, if you don't mind," said Baxter. "Be there in five minutes."

She hung up, face crimson. He was insolent, overbearing. . . . She returned to Olga's room, and she was making those futile gestures which the inexperienced always make in sick rooms when Baxter arrived. And quite without realizing how it had come about, Martha found herself, with Seena, outside the cook's door.

He *was* insolent. He had hardly spoken to her. But he was competent. There was something reassuring in the mere manner in which he had sat down on the edge of the bed, taken Olga's pulse, her temperature. Nevertheless, Olga wasn't *dying*. He could have found time for a greeting, could have forbore showing so clearly that he found Olga's mistress in the way.

She was icy cool when, fifteen minutes later, Baxter found her in the livingroom.

"She's all right now," he said. "I gave her a quarter grain of morphine."

"That's what I told you Dr. Hartley always does," said Martha, conscious of a queer feeling of triumph.

"That's the only thing any doctor can do in a case of kidney colic," said Baxter. "Most terrible pain there is. Doesn't Hartley advise an operation?"

Martha nodded.

"Olga is afraid. She thinks each attack will be the last."

Baxter shrugged.

"Maybe it will. But, if she's had many—Hartley will be around tomorrow?"

"Oh, I think so," said Martha. "We couldn't get him, and I thought of you—you called this afternoon."

He inclined his head in assent.

"Ought to have known that you'd be in the country, a pleasant summer day like this. Fresh of me, wasn't it?"

"Fresh?" The suddenness of the attack bewildered her.

"Of course it was. Don't know what was in my mind. Suddenly decided I wanted to see you again—and there I was—asking your doorman to announce me."

"You have these sudden decisions—often?" Martha asked.

"Never had one before. Haven't called on a girl in ten years. I trust the tribute is overpowering enough?"

His blue eyes, that had been stony hard as he entered Olga's room, were glinting with gayety now. Unwil-

lingly, because anger still lingered at his earlier brusqueness, Martha smiled.

"You *are* confident, aren't you?" she said.

"Not really." He suddenly seemed very young. "You see—I'm hesitating about a decision—one even more vital than my calling on you this afternoon. It—it's on my nerves. And you know how that is—when something bothers you, and you can't make up your mind about it—you do the most extraordinary things to—well, to make your mind forget its harassment."

"Such as calling on a girl?" she asked.

"Well, that is extraordinary—for me," he said. "You see, a man's judgment can be swayed by his surroundings, by his occupation, by his habits of life. And he can make the wrong decision because he hasn't seen enough of—well, of another side of life."

"And I represent another side of life?" she asked.

"From mine?" He laughed with genuine amusement. "Rather! The idle butterfly, with no object save amusement, no desires save the gratification of the moment—but a man, thousands of miles off, might think of things you represent, and might—unless he had full acquaintance with them—decide that those things were worth while, and that he'd made a mistake——"

"Whatever on earth are you talking about?" she interrupted.

"I do seem to be wandering, don't I?" he parried. "Well, it's silly, but I'll tell you. I—I have a chance to

go to China—oh, way into the interior. A foreign mission wants me to go. Oh, not as a missionary—I'm not too religious, I guess. But as a physician. They need doctors there. But I'd be completely alone. And I want to go. And yet, I'm sort of afraid that—well, that after I got there, I might feel that there were things back here, which I've never had, but that I ought to have had, that I need. Like you."

"Like *me*?" she gasped.

He nodded.

"Youth, beauty, charm, the social graces—all those things. I've had none of them. I haven't wanted them. I've been absorbed in my work. And I want to be more absorbed in it. But you—you disturbed me. No other woman ever has. But you did. And I wanted to see you, to make certain that the disturbance was slight, that it would pass away and not recur."

"I think," she said, "that you're the most extraordinary man I ever met."

"Why? Because I'm frank. Haven't other men told you, almost at sight, that you are attractive? That's really all I'm saying. Only, I'm wondering if the attraction has anything of permanence. I'm wondering if the fact that you're different from the poor women who come to me for treatment hasn't a little—*everything*—to do with the—the effect you had on me? So, I wanted to see you again, to make certain——"

She laughed with genuine amusement now.

"You want to know if an operation is needed, or if mere routine treatment will effect a cure?"

He joined her in her mirth.

"I suppose that's it," he admitted.

"And in such a momentous crisis, even a comparative stranger ought to be willing to—serve as a—a sort of test tube, eh?"

"I humbly wondered if you would," he said.

"You may come for tea tomorrow," she giggled.

"I'll be here," he said.

She threw herself on the couch in the livingroom and laughed until the tears came, after he had gone. The naïve, ridiculous man. Still, she conceded as she finally sat up, there was something nice about him, despite his red head, his bad manners, and his unsophistication. And he might make her laugh again tomorrow, and laughs were precious things, not lightly to be foregone.

And she was in a very pleasant mood, memories of Gerrish wiped out by more recent memories of Baxter, when Cranston called. Olga was comfortably asleep, and Seena would be close at hand to render any aid required by the cook, so she felt no compunctions about going out.

"Still feel like dancing?" he asked.

"Yes, don't you?"

"Absolutely. But I must be polite, mustn't I? Ladies are known to change their minds, and men must be sure to give them opportunity to do so, mustn't they?"

"What a chivalrous attitude!" she exclaimed. "I rec-

commend to every bachelor in New York long explorations into the wilderness. There, in solitude, they may learn to value my sex and acquire your gallantry."

He grinned merrily.

"You're fun," he said.

"You're fun," she echoed.

"Which makes it unanimous," he said.

They were still on this happy note of light gayety when a taxi deposited them at the Ministry. Although it was Sunday, and a hot August night, half a dozen people spoke to them in the hall, and from four tables came almost belligerent requests that they join parties already established there.

"Nothing doing," said Cranston, firmly, as he led her past Brink Towler's vociferous table. "Tonight you belong to me."

"Possessive man," she said.

"Old-fashioned," he corrected. "If I take a girl out, I like to feel that I'm to have her time."

"To receive reward for your expenditure, eh?" she charged.

"Well, why not? I hate this modern custom of cutting in on dances in public places. It's all right in a home, or at a private party in a public place, but I hate it in a restaurant."

"What I said. You spends your money and you wants your girl."

"I suppose that's it," he admitted. "But whatever it

is, old-fashionedness or just plain selfishness, I brought you out tonight, and Brink Towler and Sammy Martin-gale—nobody is going to get us at their table. And if anyone cuts in I'll be pretty ugly."

"You make me tremble," she said. "At that, you look able to defend your own."

"I am," he said simply, so simply that the words were robbed of boastfulness.

"Then, for tonight, I'll be your own," she said daringly.

"If you like it perhaps you'll continue it," he suggested.

"If urged I'll take the matter under advisement," she replied.

"It would not be difficult to want to urge you," he said.

She smiled amiably. He was a pleasant companion. No one could be pleasanter. He wore dinner clothes well, too. He was easily, with his sunburned face, his air of achievement, the most distinguished looking man in the restaurant. She was looking well herself. The blue dinner frock with the brocade slippers were most becoming.

He rose with a questioning glance. Wordlessly she rose, too, and gave herself into his arms.

He danced well; almost too well. She didn't like men who danced like gigolos. But his terpsichorean ability fell short of theirs, and so she was well content with him.

There was something tremendously masculine about him, she thought. The arm that encircled her was made

of steel. Indeed he could defend his own. And he led her with a confidence that was something apart from mere ability to dance well; it had something of character in it, something of determination and admirable assurance.

"You know, of course," he told her, "that you are the best living dancer."

"You are a competent judge?" she mocked.

"I have danced with Irene Castle," he retorted.

"Then you are a judge; and I'm enormously flattered," she said. "You're rather good yourself, you know."

She smiled impishly at him. Her face bore the expression of a mischievous little girl.

"I think we ought to find something to criticize in each other, don't you? We're doing altogether too well. It almost frightens me."

"Frightens?"

"Well, not that exactly. But we are setting such a high level of courtesy toward each other that we'll find it difficult to maintain, won't we?"

"Not I," he laughed. "And I hope you'll be too kind to admit flaws in me even when you discover them."

The music ceased; the drummer beat a roll, and they reluctantly went back to their table, while a piano was pushed out on the floor, and a singer took the centre of the room.

Martha joined in the ovation that followed the singer's first song. She liked night clubs, especially this one. She liked the entertainment, the noise, the confusion, the sight of many friends.

She looked at Cranston. He, too, was enjoying the evening. He applauded violently at the end of the second song. He waved gay greetings to friends. He might be a serious-minded explorer, but when he wasn't in the heart of a jungle, or tumbling off a precipice, he liked civilized, sophisticated pleasures.

The singer left the floor. Brinkerhoff Towler came to their table.

"High-hat, eh?" he greeted them. "Won't join us, eh? All the men crazy to have Martha, and the women nuts about the distinguished young explorer. What about it?"

"Nothing about it," growled Cranston, with mock surliness. "We reject, with contumely, contempt, scorn and decision, your invitation."

"You mean you don't want to join my party? If I'm wrong, if I misunderstand, put me right," begged Towler, grinning.

"You understand," said Cranston.

"Ah-ha, romance in the bud, eh?" said Towler.

"In full flower," said Cranston.

"In that case," said Towler, "I shall take pleasure in returning to my party and spreading the rumor that—how do the columnists put it—Herbie Cranston and Martha Blaisdell are on the stove, are that way, are uh-huh."

"Vastly descriptive," said Cranston. "On your way, man."

Towler bowed low. With a merry wink at Martha he walked back to his table.

"There! I've definitely linked our names together," said Cranston. "Shall we dance again?"

The singer had retired and eagerly Martha rose to her feet. And as she did so she collided with a man approaching the table.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she exclaimed. Then, as she recognized the man, she colored painfully. "Oh, good evening, Gerry," she said.

Gerrish glared at her. It was obvious, even to the most casual observer, that he had been drinking. He had changed his formal Sunday morning garments to a dinner jacket, and once again he was too correctly attired. His handkerchief was too elaborately draped from his breast pocket; his carnation was too large, too red. His tie was too perfect. All this, despite the patent fact that he was intoxicated.

"Didn't expect to run into you here, Martha," he said. "Didn't expect luck like this. Rang you up half an hour ago and you were gone out. Wanted to talk to you."

She cast a quick appealing glance at Cranston.

"We'll talk some other time, Gerry," she said.

Gerrish's laugh was cunning.

"Not going to be so easy to get you to talk with, Martha," he said. "You're pretty sore with me. Like to talk right now. Want to—to—dishabush—disabuse your mind. Never told anyone I was keeping you." He turned to Cranston. "Don't know you. Never saw you in my life. But you're with Martha so I guess you're all right.

She wouldn't go out with anyone not all right. Doesn't think I'm all right. Says I told people I was keeping her. Gentleman wouldn't say thing like that, and I'm gentleman."

At the next table people exchanged grins. Gerrish's voice was raised.

"Of course you are," said Cranston. "And that's why you'll run along and not annoy Miss Blaisdell, eh?"

He linked an arm through that of Gerrish. Before the latter could protest he was being whisked from the restaurant. Martha, her face crimson, sat stonily at the table awaiting Cranston's return.

Chapter V

SHE died, was reborn, and died again. As though she were disembodied, she seemed to be viewing the restaurant and its guests from some vast height which nevertheless did not prevent her from seeing and hearing clearly. She saw the people at the next table lean toward each other. She heard the sibilant whispers. She saw the grins, the meaning glances.

And not only was there subdued excitement at this near table, whose occupants had certainly overheard Gerrish. At the Towler table there was a stir. The Laneharts, with their sixteen people, were a-buzz. And people who were not acquainted with Martha, and who didn't know exactly what had happened, caught the undertone of gossip, and it seemed to her, from her vast height, that every eye in the room was fixed on the Martha Blaisdell who sat rigidly at the table.

If thought could have killed, Gerrish would have died on the brief journey to the cloakroom, where Cranston handed him over to the firm hands of attendants. Martha had never experienced the self-destroying emotion of hatred before. Now she hated. The unspeakable cad; the deliberately vile thing! Drunkenness was no extenuation of Gerrish's offense.

He had known, definitely, that Martha was through with him. That set of people whom he had been anxious to know, among whom he had hoped to establish himself, was definitely barred to him once Martha's support was withdrawn. Drunk or sober, he would have revenged himself for the injury he deemed done to him. And his cunning brain would have told him that he could do her more injury by denying the liaison which he had boasted existed, than by repeating his filthy accusation.

Cranston came back to the table. He sat down beside her and smiled easily.

"Got rid of him," he said.

"Thank you," she said, colorlessly.

"Oh, look here," he said quickly, "you mustn't take seriously anything that a drunken man says."

She tried to smile.

"I suppose not. But—it wasn't pleasant. He—he was my business man——"

Cranston lifted a quick hand.

"Please! I'm not even faintly interested in the man, what he was, who he was. I have even forgotten what he said."

"That is nice of you," she said tonelessly. Her eyes were stony.

"Will you dance?" he asked.

For a moment the thought of getting out upon that floor again was too dreadful. Then courage came back to her; courage and a sense of proportion. After all,

Gerald Gerrish was nobody and she was Martha Blaisdell. Not that a Martha Blaisdell was immune to gossip; gossip and scandal touched the most highly-placed.

But how could gossip *hurt* her? It wasn't true, and only the truth has real power, she assured herself. Further, if she left instantly, people would say to each other that she has been so embarrassed that she didn't dare remain, and embarrassment is looked upon, unjustly, as a sign of guilt.

Why, she had heard really terrific gossip about people, and yet those people, by ignoring the buzzing whispers, had conquered them. Was she to be defeated by the mutterings of a thing like Gerrish? It was too absurd.

Nevertheless, after two dances, she pleaded fatigue to Cranston.

"I hate to drag you off, when you're having a good time. At least, I hope you are," she added, smiling.

"Never had a better," he said.

"I can easily go home alone, and you might join the Towlers' party," she suggested.

"When you leave this place, the evening is ended," he said. "Of course I'll take you home. Don't be absurd."

"I'll not," she said meekly.

And then, at his quick look of suspicion at her humility, they both laughed, and the evening, what remained of it, was restored to its early level of gayety. He took her home, and they chatted of inconsequentials all the way.

"Going to Bar Harbor tomorrow," he said. "Duty.

Sister and her kids. Not that it isn't fun seeing them, but—I'd rather be seeing you. I'll be back Friday. Do you know where you're week-ending?"

"I'm going back to Trudie's," she said.

"Couldn't be sweller," he said. "Trudie has given me a blank check on her house for the rest of the summer, and whether she means it or not I'm going to draw upon her hospitality. I'll phone her in the morning. Have to, anyway. Asked me to the Follies Thursday night. Told her I had something half-on for the middle of the week. Was going down to Southampton, but I found a message from my sister tonight, giving me the dickens for having postponed my trip so long—are you deeply interested, my dear Miss Blaisdell, in these domestic details?"

"Fascinated," she said.

"I'm relieved," he said. "So then, I'll see you the end of the week. That is," he went on quickly, "if you don't mind my making plans to be where you are?"

She hid a smile at the quick alarm in his voice.

"I don't think I mind very much," she said.

And with that they parted. And once in her room Martha gave way to tears of rage. But she conquered them quickly. This was the second time today she had wept. She would not do it again. And if Gerrish was offensive a second time—but she refused to contemplate this. She brought common sense to bear upon the situation. A *worm* can't harm one. Save in public places, Gerrish would never encounter her again; and in public

places there would always be a Cranston to protect her.

Cranston found peace of mind as difficult to achieve as did Martha. The man Gerrish was a drunken lout, whose nastiness should linger in no one's memory.

Hang it, Martha Blaisdell was a *nice* girl. In addition to enormous charm and great beauty and a pretty enough wit, she was *nice*. And only a rotter would permit to linger in his memory un-nice suspicions about Martha Blaisdell. And he hoped he wasn't a rotter. Therefore he would forget the whole business.

But thoughts are not as easily dismissed as that. Condemn himself as he would, the mean thoughts persisted. They were vaguely in the back of his mind when he dropped in, the next day, at the Lake Club for luncheon.

Brink Towler, consuming an illegal cocktail, hailed him.

"Lunching? Good. With me, eh?"

"Fine," said Cranston. He refused a proffered cocktail. "Too early in the day for me, Brink," he said.

They took a table by a window. Outside the asphalt was soft in the torrid August sun.

"Gosh, how I'd like a swim," sighed Towler. "Can't understand why you stay in town these days, Herbie. Unless you're getting up an expedition or something."

"Not a thing in the world. I'm entitled to a few months vacation, and I'm taking them. As a matter of fact, though, I don't know why I hang around New York. I guess it's because I want to see people, lots of them. Then, too, I run off every week-end—going down to Bar Harbor this afternoon."

"Sister Letty? Kiss her for me," said Brink. "Grand girl. Gosh, how close I was to being your brother-in-law."

"So? Never heard that one," said Cranston, grinning. "Letty never told me."

"Letty never knew," chuckled Brink. "Had the darnedest crush on her, and too scared to tell her, and she ups and marries Sim Torrance and there we are."

"And you call that being close to being my brother-in-law? I'm going to tell Mrs. Brink on you," threatened Cranston.

Towler's good-humored countenance wrinkled in mirth.

"Mrs. Brink knows. But don't tell Letty. She'd razz me to death, the little devil."

Cranston smiled. Letty *was* a little devil, but the most charming one he knew.

"I'll keep your dark secret," he said.

"Oke," said Towler. "Say, did you slug that rat Gerish last night or just shove him out?"

"The doormen took care of him, I guess," said Cranston shortly.

"I wish you'd belted him one for the general good of the community," said Towler. "Filthy beggar. Getting a girl like Martha Blaisdell talked about."

"Is she?" asked Cranston evenly.

"Oh, come, now, don't be Galahad," said Brink. "You've been around in your day, you know. You know when the boys and girls are chatting and when they aren't."

You aren't *that* dumb, Herbie. Why, that one's been all over town for weeks. What did he say last night, anyway?"

Cranston paled slightly.

"He was drunk. He said to me that Miss Blaisdell accused him of telling people that—that he kept her. And I rushed him out. Do you really mean to tell me that this man Gerrish has actually told that sort of tale about Miss Blaisdell?"

"Well, from what you say, Martha seemed to think he has," replied Towler.

"Has he?" demanded Cranston.

Towler shrugged.

"He hasn't told me. I'd belt him over if he did. It isn't what a man *says*, Herbie. You know that. It's what he insinuates, what he looks, what he grins. He's handled Martha's affairs since her folks died. I guess she liked him in a way; didn't mind him anyway. An extra beau is always useful. So she sort of dragged Gerrish into various places. People didn't mind. He wasn't openly objectionable, and if Martha could use him—well, Martha does what she likes, you know. After all, she's Martha Blaisdell and we all bow down to her. A swell girl.

"Well, a lot of people got the impression that—I don't know how Gerrish put it over, but he did. You know, something crystallizes all of a sudden. One day a thing isn't really definitely in people's minds, and the next day they're talking of nothing else.

"Now, a lot of people happen to know how much money Martha's parents left her. They know that the securities in which it was left have dwindled to almost nothing. Yet she lives at the same rate, and——"

"Do you—for God's sake, Brink, you aren't telling me that you believe——"

"Certainly not," said Towler quickly. "But I know people that do believe it. Even as swell a girl as Martha Blaisdell can leave herself open to false interpretation. And when you add to that the hints of a swine like Gerish—well, you can add it up, can't you?"

"He ought to be shot," said Cranston softly.

"He isn't worth the chair," said Towler.

"I suppose not," sighed Cranston.

Nevertheless, after luncheon he looked at the telephone book. Ten minutes later he was in the outer room of Gerald Gerrish's brokerage offices on Forty-second Street. He gave his name to a boy and in a moment was admitted to Gerrish's presence.

The broker, seated behind a flat-topped desk, greeted him cordially.

"Meant to call you up, Cranston," said. "I've already telephoned Martha. Made a terrific ass of myself last night and wanted to apologize."

"You made more than that of yourself," said Cranston evenly. "A man isn't an ass when he insinuates evil about a woman. He's a scoundrel."

"But I didn't quite do that, Cranston," said Gerrish

evenly. "Martha got an idea in her head that was most unjust to me."

"I doubt if she, or anyone, could do you an injustice," said Cranston coolly.

Gerrish flushed, but ignored the interruption.

"I assured her last night that she was wrong. But she refused to believe me. I—well, I am devoted to Martha. I am not merely her business man, not merely the man who handled her parents' affairs during the last years of their lives, but I am her friend. And I brooded over what she had said to me. And I drank. And when, dropping in at the Ministry to take my mind off my unhappiness that Martha could so misjudge me, I saw her, I—well, I went right up to her and told her——"

"I was there; you haven't forgotten, have you?" asked Cranston. "I was the man who got up from his chair and took you by the arm and steered you out. I'm the man that whispered to you, very quietly, that if you said another word I'd wring your blackguard neck then and there. You seemed sober enough to understand, Gerrish. Surely you haven't forgotten."

He smiled blandly at the broker and his eyes were frosty.

"And I dropped in just to remind you, Gerrish, that when I said I'd wring your neck—*blackguard* neck was my exact phrase—if you said another word then, I also meant that I'd wring your neck—blackguard neck—if at any time in the future you said one word in any way deroga-

tory to Miss Blaisdell. Do I make myself exceedingly clear? I wouldn't want you, for your own sake, to misunderstand me. I say wring your neck and I *mean* wring your neck. And that's all I have to say to you, Gerrish."

He turned and started toward the door.

"Oh, I say, Cranston," cried Gerrish, "you can't talk to me that way."

Cranston wheeled instantly.

"But I *have* talked to you that way, Gerrish. And I assure you that I can continue talking to you that way, or in any way that I choose. Only, I've wasted all the words I intend to waste on you. And if you are wise, Gerrish, you won't speak to me again, here, or ever. Good afternoon."

He waited, standing there, grim, almost vicious-looking. Gerrish's eyes lowered. His lips moved but no sound came from them. Quietly, no sign of triumph on his features, Cranston left the office.

Outside, he took a taxi to his house on Murray Hill. Fashion had deserted that district for several years and then, in the habit fashion has, it had almost furtively returned. The old Cranston house, on Thirty-ninth Street a few doors from Fourth Avenue, was dwarfed by the towering office buildings in the neighborhood.

Cranston's sister Letty had cabled him, in the height of the boom days, an extraordinary offer for the place. "You'll never get a better," she had told him.

"I hope I don't," he had replied, "because I might be tempted to sell and I never intend to."

It was altogether too big for a bachelor; but it would be a bully home for a man and wife; the old nursery upstairs could easily resound again to the cries of romping children. What gorgeous times he and Letty had had there in the days gone by.

Then he felt himself crimsoning. Good lord, what sort of silly daydreams were these! About a girl, too, concerning whom unpleasant rumors were abroad. Of course, they wern't true. . . . But Brink Towler, who was fond of Martha—Brink Towler thought they were true. Oh, he denied it, but—his denials did not ring true.

Cranston's shoulders were slumped as he heavily climbed the stairs to his bedroom.

Chapter VI

MARTHA BLAISDELL yawned deliciously. She stretched luxuriously. Yesterday had been just a bit of Hades added to a week of purgatory. Monday had been hot, Tuesday had been torrid, Wednesday has been blistering, Thursday had been scorching, and Friday had been a torment.

And then, shortly after luncheon, Cranston had telephoned. And the day had suddenly seemed liveable. Not that her heart beat faster at sound of his voice, but security, a security that had seemed dreadfully far away during the five days just past, seemed close at hand.

She had missed Cranston since last Sunday. Not in the way that one missed a lover, but as one misses a gay companion. Also, with each passing day, the necessity of marriage impressed itself upon her more strongly, and Cranston seemed the only possible—even desirable—answer to that need.

Over and over again she had assured herself that she could not do so mean a thing. She couldn't marry a man whom she didn't love. And then she would remember that Cranston had heard Gerrish's remarks, and that it was extremely doubtful that a man of Cranston's antecedents and outlook would permit himself to fall in love with a girl about whom there was the slightest gossip.

This was a lax generation, but Cranston was not spiritually of it. He would insist upon the impeccability of reputation as sternly as his father or grandfather had done. And the fear that she might not be able to attract him, win him, overshadowed her qualms of conscience.

She had received a telegram from him on Wednesday. Just a line saying that he would drive her down to the Lemmings if she would permit. And she had replied that she would permit.

She did not know what an inner struggle Cranston had gone through before he sent the wire. He had arrived in Bar Harbor late on Tuesday morning and his sister had met him.

She kissed him, hugged him, and fussed over him all the brief ride to their place on the ocean. Then, shooing the nephews and nieces from Uncle Bert's room—his family disdained the Herbie that his friends had bestowed on him—she eyed him sternly.

"Who's the girl, Bert?"

"Girl? Girl? What the deuce are you talking about? And will you get the devil out of my room, Letty? I want to change into flannels, and how can I do it if you stick around here?"

"I'll shut my eyes and turn my back, brother of mine," she replied. "At that," she went on critically, "you look a bit fat to me in clothes. But never mind that now. I want to know who the girl is."

"Who what girl is?" he demanded. He turned away,

fussing over dressing-table things, that she might not observe his faint blush. Letty *was* a devil! How could she guess—or had Millie or Mrs. Dan or some other of those gossiping females on Long Island told her about his mild attentions to Martha Blaisdell? He wouldn't put it past any of them to ring Letty on the long-distance and spill, not what they knew, hang 'em, but what they imagined.

"You've been promising for a month to come down here. And when you do come, you wire that you must leave on Thursday. It must be a girl. It *has* to be a girl."

"And you, being a girl, would have to think exactly that," he said. "No girl at all. Don't know any girl. What *are* girls?" he asked.

Letty pursed her lips and nodded.

"All right, my dear. But I'll find out. And when I do—"

She left her threat unuttered, and, like the good sort she was, dropped the subject, seeing that it brought him embarrassment, if not slight annoyance.

She produced other girls, charming girls, for her brother that afternoon and evening. But his mind was on Martha all the time. There were pretty figures around Letty's pool, but none so divinely young as Martha's. There were pretty faces, but none to compare with Martha's. There was no charm like Martha's, no quick wit like hers.

But—gossip had smirched her. Of course, it couldn't be true, but even swine like Gerrish hesitated to utter in-

sinuations completely baseless. Of course, he put himself in Gerrish's class by even thinking of crediting the gossip, but—

He argued with himself all the next day and finally sent the telegram to Martha. And when her reply came that night it somehow distilled all his doubts and left them nothing but trust. He was not absent-minded that night or morning and Letty, who knew that a telegram had come for him, also knew that it must have come from a girl. And she wrote to Mrs. Dan Treman the day after her brother left for New York.

Cranston had called for Martha at about three, and at five they were swimming in the Lemming pool. They dined with the Braleys, had pleasant bridge afterwards, and on the way home a breeze had sprung up.

And now, on this Saturday morning, the breeze still endured. From her pillow Martha could see white-caps on the Sound. It had been worth a week of discomfort to achieve, at the end, so gorgeous a day. She pressed a bell that would cause breakfast to be fetched to her, and went to her bath. Twenty minutes later, fresh and fragrant, she greeted the maid who brought her orange juice, coffee and toast.

"In bed? I think I'd rather have it on the porch," she said.

The maid nodded cheery assent and placed the tray on a table on the screened porch. Martha took a quick look in the mirror. Her blue pajamas were becoming; her

hair glistened; her creamy skin pleased her, and she wore just enough lipstick. Yes, she could stand the scrutiny of the morning sun.

She sat down at her table, and from the croquet lawn voices floated up to her. She called a gay hello.

Faces were upturned. There were Cranston, and Bob Lemming, and Mrs. Dan, and Millie Cragin, and Trudie.

"Hello, yourself, you lazy thing," called Bob. "Everyone else has been abroad since dawn. Only you, slothful one, lie abed—"

"I'm not lying abed," Martha defended herself. "I'm up, rosy and lovely, in pajamas that are divine—"

"Are you receiving in them?" asked Cranston.

"Trudie, you are my hostess," said Martha. "It is you, and no one else, who must set the standard of morality for your guests. May a young—and may I interpolate charming—young woman receive gents in her pajamas?"

Trudie Lemming laughed.

"I'm wearing them myself," she said. "I guess you can."

Martha waved a gay hand.

"I'm receiving in them, Mr. Cranston," she called.

"Oh, hang," cried Bob Lemming, "now we never will get to golf. And I want another cup of coffee myself. Let's all go."

It was gay, up there on the porch. Everyone discovered a new appetite, and the maid was busy bringing fresh coffee—and for Bob and Dan Treman fresh pancakes—

for the next quarter-hour. Depression seemed far away. Martha's misgivings of the past week seemed ridiculous. Cranston, always delightful, seemed to have acquired a new charm overnight. It might not be impossible to fall in love with him after all.

The maid came out upon the porch, this time bringing no dishes.

"Doctor Baxter has arrived, ma'am," she said to her mistress.

Trudie looked at her husband.

"There, Bob! He's yours, not mine. You go down and receive him."

Lemming smiled at his wife.

"You don't mean that, my dear."

"Of course I don't." She returned her husband's smile. It was a bore, having a complete stranger come for the week-end, not knowing if he golfed or tennised or swam or played bridge, or would fit in at all. And Trudie Lemming was a bit proud of the way she saw to it that her guests all blended amiably. But she would try to hide her slight annoyance.

"Ah-ha, a slight rift in the Lemming lute," said Mrs. Dan. "Who is the unwelcome guest?"

Trudie flushed, ashamed of her momentary faint ungraciousness.

"He's not a bit unwelcome. He's an old friend of Bob's. He telephoned yesterday asking if he could come out. Bob hasn't seen him for years, but—you know Bob."

"Surely. And we know Bob's friends, too," said Millicent. "They're all swell, and we need another man, anyway. What's the matter with this—what's his name?"

"Baxter. Peter Baxter. Nothing in the world the matter with him. According to Bob, he couldn't be nicer. He's a doctor. Runs a clinic downtown somewhere. Gives his life to the poor, and that sort of thing."

"He doesn't sound exciting," said Dan Treman.

"No? You found him pretty exciting once," said Lemming. "Age has dulled your memory, kid. Run your hand over your collar-bone, young feller. Remember the Yale tackle that broke it?"

Treman leaped to his feet, spilling a cup of coffee.

"You don't mean *Pete* Baxter? Do I remember him? Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun if I ever forget him."

He was gone from the room like an arrow from a bow. Two minutes later, while the others buzzed, Treman returned, literally dragging after him an embarrassed but smiling Peter Baxter, who went through the introductions gracefully.

Martha held out a hand to him.

"We know each other," she said.

"I suppose," said Bob scornfully, "that you're one of his patients."

Unaccountably, Martha found herself coloring.

"I called him in last Sunday," she said.

"Well, for heaven's sake, Pete," cried Bob Lemming, "if you're a fashionable doctor, swelling around with patients like Martha, why haven't we heard about it?"

Baxter smiled.

"I'm afraid Miss Blaisdell exaggerates. I haven't reached her heights. Her cook was ill. That's as close as I've got to the rarefied atmospheres of chic and finance and culture that you all frequent."

"Ooh, a mean cracker," said Treman. "As tough in a boudoir as on a football field."

"Tougher," grinned Baxter. "You look fat, Dan."

"Is th-at so?" drawled Treman. "Well, Doc, I'll take you right down to the tennis court and run some beef off you."

"I haven't played for six years," said Baxter.

"Then let's make it doubles," said Millie Cragin. "Martha, you'll play, won't you? Don't play singles, Doctor Baxter."

"Call him Pete," said Treman. "That'll be a relief to him after the things I called him last time I saw him."

"Boy, you did use language," chuckled Baxter.

"With a broken collar-bone, who wouldn't?" demanded Treman. "But say, where've you been? I heard someone say something—last winter it was—about a Doc Baxter doing swell work down in the slums, but I never dreamed it was you. Who'd ever think a rough guy like you would turn gentle and tender and a ministering healer to the poor?"

"Let the man alone, Dan," said his wife. "He was too good for you on the football field, and you're not going to pick on him here. Doubles, eh, Pete?"

He smiled gratefully at her friendly address.

"Doubles it is, Mrs. Dan. You're nice not to let Dan pick on me. But I'll have to dress, Mrs. Lemming."

"Bob, show him his room," said Trudie.

Millicent Cragin whistled gently as the men departed.

"He's suh-well," she breathed. "Trudie, you needn't be alarmed about him spoiling your week-end. For my own part—my health has been a matter of concern to me lately. I need care and attention from a red-headed man. Don't you love those freckles? Tell us about him. Who is he?"

"Bob knew him at Yale," said Trudie. "His grandfather was old Whelan Baxter, ambassador to somewhere or other once, and his father was a great old beau in his day. But this young man—knew everybody, went everywhere as a boy. Then—he quit running into New York, quit raising Cain with the other fellows. And when he graduated, he went in for medicine. Nothing strange about that, but it was strange the way he went into a charity clinic, hasn't seen anybody at all, simply slaves, like a fanatic, for the poor. Nothing of a prig, though, is he? Martha, you know him. What about him?"

Martha shrugged.

"I've only seen him twice in my life."

"And that's enough," cried Millie. "You're a fast worker. Now, look ye here, Marthie Blaisdell. I'm a plain poor woman, outspoken and none of your society dames, I'm not. Modest little Millie is what they call me, but I'm a fighting demon in defense of my own. You

saw him first, but I claim him first. You little wretch, you've sunk Herbie Cranston, and that's enough for any girl in one season. You leave my doctor be."

"*Your* doctor," giggled Trudie.

"Mine," said Millie with determination.

"Think you can get him?" asked Trudie, still giggling.

"Massachusetts, there she stands," said Millie. "The world knows her record. Two army officers, one embassy secretary, one broker and two—count 'em—bankers. If I can't get one helpless doctor—and I've always wanted to visit the sick and be a sort of Florence Nightingale—"

"You wicked little rascal," interrupted Trudie. "Come on, they're calling to us."

It was after the tennis, in which, considering his lack of practice, Baxter did remarkably well, that Martha exchanged her first words with him.

"I hope you don't mind my coming out here," he said.

"Mind? Why should I mind? Isn't it rather a happy accident?"

He shook his head.

"Naturally, you'd think that. But—it wasn't an accident. You see—you weren't at home last Monday afternoon."

She had worried about this herself, though not seriously. Something had turned up on Monday and her engagement with Baxter had completely left her mind. She had thought, later, of telephoning, but had neglected to do so.

"I was rude," she said.

He smiled gayly.

"My prerogative. But—I wanted to see you."

"So I gathered," she said. "As an experiment, wasn't it?"

He nodded.

"An earnest scientist never postpones things like that. So—well, I phoned yesterday afternoon, and your maid told me where you were. And I telephoned Bob Lemming, reminding him of our old friendship—and here I am."

"And so what?" she slangily asked. "What am I to do? You see, I haven't been a test tube before."

"Perhaps you won't care to be one now," he said. "Are you engaged to Mr. Cranston?"

"Am I *what*?" she gasped. "What on earth put such an idea into your head?"

"The way he looks at you," he answered.

"The way he looks at me?"

"Rather like the way I do, I imagine," he said.

She stared at him.

"Oh, come now, Doctor Baxter. Fun is fun, but—we barely know each other, and you're not telling me—what *are* you telling me, anyway?"

"It's rather obvious, isn't it?" he parried.

And then Millie Cragin descended upon them.

Millicent Cragin had not idly boasted when she had pointed to her record. The army men, the brokers, and

the diplomats—Millie had a rather universal appeal. Cornsilk hair, blue eyes, pouting mouth and lovely figure, money, position and good fun—these were Millicent's assets. And the only depression that would cause these assets to diminish would be old age, and that was far from Millie. Too, she was confident of her ability to subdue any man, and confidence—when backed by charm—is half the battle. Men like women who know what they want, if what they want is the men they are with. To be liked by an unattractive woman is a bore; to be admired by a charming woman is delightful.

She had a peculiar effect upon men. At first glance they thought her hair was a shade too light and her eyes too pale. They turned away indifferently. They glanced again and didn't look away again. For when Millie went to work she did so with the sure technique of the artist. It took a many-sided woman to convince diplomats, soldiers, and brokers that here was not merely someone to love, but the ideal help-meet for a diplomat, soldier, or broker.

Unfortunately, Millie was a bit of a cat. Women knew this but liked her despite the weakness. She kept her acquisitive fingers off married men. So, she was asked everywhere and enjoyed a genuine popularity, and when someone, a trifle harder to convince than most, asked why, with all her attractions, Millie had achieved twenty-eight years and no husband, the answer came pat.

"Don't you know? You remember Callie Curtayne.

They were engaged. Wedding date set, trousseau nearly finished, honeymoon trip planned—you *can't* have forgotten. Callie flew her down to Southampton for a week-end with the Burgesses. He took young Burgess up for a flight and they crashed. You *must* remember. The only man Millie really ever cared for. Do you know that for six years she hasn't seen a soul on the anniversary of her wedding day—what would have been the anniversary? Just goes into hiding."

And this, in a somewhat hard-boiled age, was looked upon as evidence of Millie's sterling loyalty.

But to Martha, at the moment, Millie was an intrusive cat. Millie had been around. Millie knew the ropes and the rules. Millie could scent romance—or its tentative beginnings—a mile away. Millie knew better than to break in when a man's manner was serious and a girl's not too unreceptive. And then Martha hated herself for her own pettiness. Baxter's manner hadn't been *that* serious, nor had her own manner been a "keep off" sign to other women. She was unfair. Further, it was her present task to fascinate Cranston, and she should be grateful to anyone or anything that prevented her from letting her thoughts slide to other matters—or to another man.

"I won't permit this," said Millie gayly. "Martha is too attractive, Dr. Baxter. No, Pete is the name. She monopolizes all the men. Martha, you run off and sell your papers. They're getting up more doubles and need you."

The words were crude, but Millie's manner was never that. Her actions could be crude, also, but there was something suave about her that softened the action. She made it appear that Martha was really needed on the court and that she had been assigned to take care of Baxter for the moment.

Martha looked at Baxter. If he were disappointed that he had not finished his talk with her, he didn't show it. Yet, he must be disappointed. Why, she, Martha Blaisdell, was disappointed. And as she strolled toward the courts, she wondered at this.

Why, she wasn't even interested in the doctor from St. John's Square. As a matter of fact, she was only interested in Bert Cranston. Only a man with money *could* interest her. The past week's examination into her finances had shown her that they were worse than she could have dreamed. Cranston was a pleasant way out of her difficulties. Marriage with him was no longer something to be idly considered; it was something to be definitely schemed for.

That this bizarre man, Peter Baxter, was interested in her was a matter not even to be thought about. He was, as a heart interest, distinctly not possible. Let the brazen Millie have him. Yet she felt an unaccountable reluctance at letting Millie win so easy a victory.

Chapter VII

OF COURSE, as she had known, none of the group wanted more tennis at the moment. The pool called to them, and Martha was sitting on its edge, watching Baxter thrash, with great strength but little skill, up and down the pool. Millie's triumph, she rather gleefully told herself, had not been too permanent. But why shouldn't it be? A man like Baxter and a girl like Millie—it would make a perfect match, and only a woman who was more of a cat than Millie would interfere with its making.

“Quite a man,” said Cranston's voice beside her.

Martha turned. Cranston had dressed leisurely. Martha felt humorously certain the explorer made as much of an art of undressing as of dressing. Not that he was, she thought, finicky, but somewhat methodical. Well, a little contact with method would do her no harm. She had been unmethodical for too long. Her carelessness had resulted in the unpleasantness with Gerrish. Had she been a stickler for details, used just ordinary common sense, not shut her eyes to obvious things, she would not have permitted her broker to put her in a position that was, to say the least, anomalous.

He was quite a man, too. That brick-red burn of his

face, she noticed, which indicated more exposure to sun and wind than indulgence in outdoor sports would account for, extended to his shoulders and chest. She visualized him toiling, drenched with perspiration, in a tropic jungle. That man who risked dangers for his career was entirely different from the man who saw to it that his tie was in consonance with his socks, who could order an harmonious dinner. And both men pleased her. She admired the explorer and enjoyed the man-about-town.

"Anything wrong with the one-and-a-half today?" he smiled.

"Haven't tried it," she replied. "Let me see you do it."

He shook his head.

"When Jones plays golf I look on. I'd never dream of strumming chords if Paderewski were in the room. And so I won't do any diving today, thank you."

She would, to make idle conversation, have insisted, but that the telephone rang in the Lemming dressingroom and from the pool Bob asked her to answer it.

"Is Miss Blaisdell there?" a servant asked.

"This is Miss Blaisdell."

"New York calling," said the man. Carelessly he did not give her the name of her caller. And through the earpiece came the voice of Gerrish.

"Martha?"

"Well?" she said icily.

"Martha, I have to talk to you."

"I'm listening," she said.

"You've got to help me," he said.

"Yes?"

She could feel her body trembling.

"Jimmy Munson has taken down my name from the Course Club," said Gerrish.

"Well?"

"You'll have to do something about it," he said.

"Will I?" she asked.

"You must see him. You must tell him——"

"Can I force people into my friends' clubs?" she interrupted.

"You can if you want," he said.

"Well—I don't want," she said.

"Then I'll make you want, Martha," he cried. "I'm not going to be dropped by people merely because you think I said something about you."

"It isn't because *I* think so. Evidently Jimmy thinks so," she said.

"But if you tell him that you know I didn't——"

"But I know you did," she told him. "Gerry, you must be mad. Do you think that I would do anything to push you among people with whom you evidently don't belong?"

"You thought I belonged to them until recently," he said.

"That was my mistake," she retorted.

"But not as big a mistake as you're making now," he said.

"And just what do you mean by that?" she asked.

"I mean that I'm not going to permit you to treat me this way. Martha, I've thought it over. I was good enough to give you money—*give* it, I say, and you knew I was giving it. I was good enough to go around with you, to meet your friends. But I'm not good enough now, and I won't stand for your attitude. Perhaps you think your friend Cranston frightened me. You listen to me. I have a lawyer, and he knows how to take care of threats against me. If he attempts to attack me I'll have him in jail, and don't you think otherwise. And it wouldn't be hard to bring a suit against you, Martha, and if newspapermen asked me what the suit was about—well, the things you think I've said might actually be said. I tell you, unless you speak to Jimmy Munson——"

"I'll speak to no one," she said. "And, Gerry, I don't wish you ever to speak to me. I don't want you calling me up. There are lawyers in my acquaintance, Gerry, and some of them will know how to deal with a blackmailer."

She hung up with a click. She looked at herself in the mirror over Trudie's dressing-table. She was white and shaking, too obviously wrought up to permit the others to see her. So, trying to stiffen her weak knees, she went to her own room and dressed. The six or seven minutes it took to do this were sufficient to steady her nerves, and she was quite calm, and her creamy skin was not too pale when she rejoined the others at the pool.

Cranston looked up in disappointment.

"Dressed? I hoped you'd swim a while."

"You watched me the other day; now I'll watch you," she said.

"I suppose that's fair enough," he laughed. He plunged gracefully into the water, and she stared at the rippling pool.

So Cranston had not let the matter drop at the Ministry the other night? He'd gone to Gerrish and threatened him. That was—fine of him. She felt a quick surge of tenderness toward the man now swimming easily down the pool. She needed a protector, and this man had heard gossip about her and gone to gossip's source to stop it. And because he had heard gossip he had not avoided her. He was—she knew—about to propose.

Why, if only in gratitude for his chivalry, she ought to accept him. Oh, perhaps there had been a day when chivalry was common, when gentlemen resented insults to ladies with force. But men like that weren't so frequent these days. Or perhaps they were. Perhaps her standards had been affected by the people she went with. Oh, they were nice people, but—they tore reputations to pieces quite casually. They talked freely—much too freely—about their acquaintances, even their friends. No, there weren't many of them who would physically resent a man like Gerrish. Some of them, like Jimmy Munson, would withdraw their support from Gerrish, most of them would refuse to include him in invitations hereafter; but Cranston had evidently gone to see the man, denounced and threatened him.

"Our conversation was not finished," said Baxter's voice beside her.

He had swum to the edge of the pool near her, and was looking up at her now. The water, instead of smoothing his recalcitrant red hair, had made it more tousled than ever. His freckles were somehow more conspicuous now than ever, and she saw that they extended over his arms and shoulders.

Yet no woman would have said that he was unattractive. His blue eyes were frank, and at the moment they were gay. And the way he pulled himself up from the pool was an indication of tremendous strength.

"Wasn't it?" she asked, quite at a loss as to just what to say.

"Certainly not," he said. "I asked if you were engaged, and your delightful friend Miss Cragin summoned you to the tennis court before you had answered me."

"Did you expect me to reply to such an impertinence?" she asked.

"You don't really think it was an impertinence, do you?" he countered.

To her amusement she found herself replying, "No."

"I'm glad of that," he said. "You see, if you were engaged to another man—well, that would sort of preclude a proposal from anyone else, wouldn't it?"

There he was, wet and tousled of hair, half in and half out of the pool. Millie had disappeared, probably into the house. The Dan Tremans and the Lemmings were

arguing about a proposed relay race. There was a matter of handicap—and subsequent wager—to be adjusted, one gathered from the high and gay recriminations. Cranston, appealed to as arbiter, was refusing to be drawn into the argument. Altogether, it was a typical week-end group, at a typical Long Island house, indulging in the typical amusement of its kind.

Martha, her eyes raised above the head of Baxter, looked almost unseeingly beyond him. It seemed to her that she saw with her mind, rather than with her eyes. There were the Lemmings and the Tremans in this pool. In other pools, or on the beaches, or on the tennis courts, or at the bridge tables, or playing backgammon, or finishing a morning round of golf, or starting off for pre-polo luncheon, were similar groups. There was much talk of depression and considerable evidence of it, but amusement hadn't ceased. Bridge and backgammon stakes had diminished, and foursomes played five-dollar Nassaus instead of fifty, but the play side of life had not been affected much. True, yachts were laid up, and not as many polo ponies would run over the turf, and great houses had been closed.

But the temper and the tempo of the set she knew had actually not changed at all. Parties were smaller but about as numerous. Certainly the fever for amusement, amusement, amusement, had in no way diminished. When, occasionally, one of this group of pleasure-seekers commented on his own way of living, he shrugged his

shoulders and said, "One must do something to forget hard times." Three years ago he would have said, "One must do something to forget boredom."

That one might acquire an interest in something a trifle more substantial than a birdie on the long eighth hole, or in the proper method to arrive at a grand slam, simply didn't occur to them. Or, if it did, an unwillingness to admit a serious side kept that serious side carefully hidden. Willie Henderson, for example, had actually lectured on medieval lecterns before a Romance literature class. His study of churches had forced him to acquire a vast knowledge of the history and literature of the period that preceded the Renaissance. He had even been offered a professorship.

But did Willie, save to his closest intimates, ever admit his grand passion? Certainly not. If he wasn't ashamed of his interest, at least he kept quiet about it. It was, so to speak, slightly off the norm, and one adhered to pattern. To listen to Willie at dinner or later, one would have been convinced that he knew nothing beyond Twenty Grand's racing record and who had been presented at the Court of St. James in 1926.

There were others like Willie, too. For example, laughing at the challenges and counter-challenges being hurling from Lemming to Treman and back again, stood, thigh-deep in the water, Bert Cranston. He *did* things. Yet, if his acquaintance were aware of his exploits, they never mentioned them. They never drew Bert out to talk

about his experiences. And as soon as he returned to civilization, she gathered, he became instantly the man-about-town, with no interest beyond amusement.

Was achievement, devotion to something a trifle more important than the pleasure of the moment, something of which to be ashamed? It was all very well not to air your knowledge, not to boast of your achievements, if you had any. But if you didn't have any—and the Hendersons and the Cranstons were not overly frequent—why couldn't you, once in a while, show a wish—or at least, a willingness—to listen to people who knew or did?

An occasional reference to foreign debts and much talk about Prohibition—these were almost the only matters of public interest that were ever touched upon in general conversation, except, of course, the latest sensational crime or revue in the theatre.

Nice people. Jolly, generous, well-bred people. But—to live with them forever, without an outside interest. . . . The great of the world visited them. Statesmen, scientists, artists of all descriptions. Yet she had never heard one of these dominate a dinner table. On the contrary, every one of them had been over-awed by the irrelevant chatter, the aimless talk for talk's sake that rippled up and down the board.

She looked down now at Peter Baxter. Cranston represented something a bit different from the life she had known. For months at a time he disappeared into the remote places, and when he returned men of scientific standing welcomed him, listened to him.

But Peter Baxter represented something completely different. He didn't disappear for a few months, to return and take up the old life until the wanderlust, or whatever it was that animated Cranston, seized him again. Baxter had broken definitely with the old idle life. He had devoted himself to his profession, and that profession was healing.

It had been years since Bob Lemming, a close friend, had seen him. Peter Baxter had returned to this life of which she was a part merely to see her. The life itself, although he could adapt himself gracefully to it, meant nothing to him.

Indeed, that wasn't quite true. It doubtless meant something to avoid, although he had not shown a sign of disapproval thus far. Of course not; he was a man, not a prig who frowned because people were happy. Why, he spent his life trying to give people health, and health was happiness.

She made the reply for which, she felt, he had been waiting with a patience partly compounded of amusement.

"It would," she said. And even if the girl weren't engaged, but were about to be, another man might feel that his proposal was—well, that he ought not, perhaps, make it."

His freckles showed more distinctly against his sudden pallor.

"I—wish you all happiness, Miss Blaisdell," he said.

"Thank you, Peter," she said. "And—and—aren't

you being a little bit silly? I mean—you speak as though—your voice is—well, tragic. After all, you’ve only seen me three times and——”

“How often have you seen Cranston?” he asked shrewdly. “You see,” he went on as she colored, “time doesn’t matter.”

And then, as if his mood moved as quickly as his body, he was half across the pool. She stared at him for a moment, then thoughtfully began walking toward the house.

Of course, it was too ridiculous. He was a charity doctor, with no possible career ahead of him, and—she wasn’t the least bit in love with him. Still, it was—pleasing—to know that she had made so definite an impression on a really attractive man. Of course, he wasn’t as attractive as Cranston, and certainly he wasn’t eligible, but still. . . . She thought very tenderly of Peter Baxter as she entered her room.

And down by the pool Trudie Lemming beckoned to Baxter. He swam to her. The others had raced to the dressingrooms to prepare for luncheon.

“I like you, Peter,” said Trudie. Her snapping brown eyes were gentle as they looked down at him.

The young man flushed with quick embarrassment.

“I can’t think of anything that could make me happier than knowing that,” he said.

Trudie’s eyes were wise now.

“I can,” she said.

Before the meaning in her glance he colored more deeply.

"I've been watching you," she went on.

"I hope I've been behaving," he smiled.

"So well that I'm furious with Bob. How dare he have so nice a friend and not produce him years ago? How dare he wait for you to telephone him?"

"You're too kind," he said.

She shook her head. The slight ringlets at the nape of her neck nodded vehemently.

"Not a bit of it. If you drop into the silences again you'll have hurt me frightfully."

"I won't," he promised. He looked at her gentle face, lovelier in the early thirties than it had ever been in her glowing youth. She was a born wife and mother and the fulfilment of her destiny had lent graciousness to her face and body as well as to her mind and heart.

"You're kind," he said again.

"I'm not," she said. "But I'm going to be. Forget all about Martha. It—it would never do. And would only spoil the thing that, being Martha, she must do."

"Now, what," he gasped, "do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what you think I mean," she replied.

Chapter VIII

THERE are eight of us," Bob announced as the pleasant luncheon neared its end. "Two four-somes."

"But some may want to play nine holes only," Trudie reminded him.

"Hang those weaklings," said Dan Treman. "Let's forget them. The Lemmings beat us, Mrs. Dan, swimming. But we can take them at golf. Let the other guests take care of themselves."

"And I'm sure they can," said Trudie. "How will you team up?" she addressed them collectively.

"I'll take Pete," said Millie promptly.

"You are accepting defeat gracefully in advance," smiled Baxter. "I haven't played much lately."

"And you hadn't played much tennis," scoffed Millie, "and were all right. Anyway, I'm *good*. I admit it. I'm equal to ninety-five. How about you, Martha?"

Martha shook her head.

"You're strokes better than I am, Millie." She looked at Cranston. "How about you?"

He shrugged.

"The middle eighties—I hope."

"Then we'll have to give their best ball a stroke," said Martha determinedly, "on the par five holes."

"Shylock," said Baxter. "You haven't even asked what I go around in."

Martha grinned.

"The idea is to ward off demands," she said. "I think I'm pretty sporting, not knowing what you play, to offer as much as I did."

"Well, if you offer blindly, we won't accept blindly," said Baxter.

And the wrangle over the handicaps enlivened the rest of the luncheon and the brief drive to Green Point. There the family match between the Tremans and the Lemmings was given precedence, and when they had all played their second shots, Martha, having been allotted the honor, drove.

It was a good match. Millie excelled herself and Baxter achieved a par on the long seventh that made his side one up. He played erratically, but with promise, Martha noted. As for Cranston, his game was steady and above the average. They ended all square which, as there was no bet upon the result, gave satisfaction all around.

"Sure you don't want to continue?" Millie asked.

Cranston shook his head.

"I'd rather see the polo," he confessed. "But if Martha——"

She interrupted his quick readiness to do her will. A proposal lurked in the offing. She wanted to hear it. It meant security; it meant surcease of worry; it meant that a strong man, an attractive and delightful strong man,

would henceforth shield her from the things of life that harassed her.

"I'd like to watch the game," she said.

"Shall we play nine more?" Millie asked Baxter.

"I'd love it," he said. And if he suspected matters so electrically in the air that Martha was willing to believe the whole world knew of them, his manner gave no indication of it. He nodded pleasantly to Martha and Cranston and strolled off with Millie to the tenth tee.

Martha permitted Cranston to guide her through the maze of motors drawn up about the clubhouse. Tommy Hitchcock was playing this afternoon and so were the Guests and Hopping and Laddie Sanford and several other players from whom would ultimately be chosen the team to play in South America in the fall. In the stand and boxes some thousands of people were already assembled, and across the fairways, seriously impeding the golfers, trooped other hundreds who proposed to watch the match as best they could from the ground.

"Are you a polo fanatic?" asked Cranston.

She shook her head.

"Must I be one?"

He grinned.

"Not at all. I like the game—mildly. What I meant was that I'll find seats in a box, if you like. If you don't like, we might perch ourselves on the rocks near the fourth hole and in the shade of the trees look on."

"I'd much prefer that," she said.

Past the pretty clubhouse, where belated lunchers or very early tea-ers refreshed themselves, they walked. Had Martha any doubts before they would have been banished now. Quite deliberately Cranston had chosen his scene, she knew. They could watch the polo quite well from the shaded rocks. Also, no one else would be there, and they could not be overheard.

She had never been proposed to before. She had read the symptoms of proposal in men several times, but had managed to evade the actual question. She had never wanted scalps at her belt. But those other occasions had never made her nervous; she had known that she would be able to handle the situation.

But this time—she was not merely going to listen; she was going to reply affirmatively. She was going to listen to a man tell his quick love for her—what sort of madness was in the world anyway? Two men had fallen in love with her practically at sight. And another girl had fallen, even more swiftly, in love with one of the men.

It was an age of speed. Probably—she didn't know—our grandparents fell in love less instantly; probably their emotions kept leisurely pace with the stagecoach and sailing vessel of their day. But that wasn't so. History was full of tales of swift romances of the past. But maybe these tales had gained historical place because they recounted rare experiences.

She smiled at her own idleness of thought. Cranston caught the glimmer of her merriment.

"Ordinary thoughts are worth a penny, I believe," he said, "but smiling thoughts are worth much more. Will you name your price?"

"There will be no price," she rejoined. "Ask me some other time and I'll tell you freely."

They had reached the vantage point by the fourth green now. From their slight height they could look across the playing field and at the color of the hats and frocks in the grandstand and boxes. Beyond, in the road, were great vans which conveyed the ponies from their stables to the game. Grooms attended them, and small boys, with an eye to futures as jockeys, perhaps, stared open-mouthed.

Upon the field horses and men dashed about, warming up for the game. The white ball went incredible distances with deadly accuracy, and was recovered in a midst of swirling hoofs and straining horsemen.

And it was all an everyday—certainly every week-end—occurrence down here on Long Island. And after the polo there would be tea and cocktails and pleasant bridge, and then there would be dressing for dinner, and there would be the Hyslops' dance for their debutante daughter. . . . And on other week-ends there would be other polo and golf and tennis and swimming and debutante parties which the older people would attend, and bridge and a sail on the Sound. And in the fall there would be the cure at French Lick, or a pleasant pretense of it at White Sulphur, and in the cold days of January there would be a migration south, and in the spring

there would be a dash over to Liverpool for the Grand National. . . x .

Why, anyone who had tasted of this life, to whom it had become the normal and natural way of living, would be mad to abandon it. And if one married Cranston one wouldn't abandon it. Oh, there would be variations but not abandonment. Cranston's wife would go with him to the outposts of civilization and wait for him there, to share his triumph when he returned. Perhaps, even, Cranston the husband might not find it as easy to withdraw from civilization as Cranston the bachelor had found it.

But this was not right. She must not permit herself to think of deflecting Cranston from the road he had chosen. If she could not give him the full measure of love he rated, surely she would be the exact kind of helpmeet he needed.

Meticulously Cranston saw that she was seated comfortably on an outgrowth of grass. He offered her a cigarette, lighted one himself and then threw it away.

"I suppose you know what I'm about to tell you, don't you?" he asked.

"I suppose I do," she said faintly.

"I hope you know what you are going to reply," he said.

"Perhaps I even know that," she admitted.

"I hope it's what I want to hear," he went on.

Faint coquetry was in her voice as she replied.

"But I haven't yet been told, you know," she said.

"It won't take long, Martha. I'm mad for you. I love you. I want to marry you. I think—the moment I saw you—I knew. I wonder if you knew, too. Martha, my dearest, will you marry me?"

This was the time, if ever, to be honest with him. Indeed, the time had really been before he proposed. She had prevented other men from committing themselves, saving them hurt to heart or pride. She could not save Cranston that now. But she could save him from marrying a woman who did not love him. And for a moment she hesitated. But only for a moment. He had the things she wanted. He wanted her. The exchange seemed fair enough.

"I'll marry you, Bert," she told him.

Millie Cragin became tired at the fifteenth. It is an old device and one imagines that girls employed it when golf was an infant in Holland. Sometimes it is the sixteenth and sometimes even as early as the thirteenth. It all depends on which hole has the proper scenic surroundings, such as secluded woods, or a summer-house by a lake, or whatever else of a romantic nature the course boasts.

Green Point's fifteenth green is surrounded on three sides by noble trees, pleasantly spaced so that one may stroll easily through them, and well-defined paths lead, by various routes, back to the clubhouse. And once one dives into one of these paths one is safe from observation until one emerges by the clubhouse.

The Green Point caddies are well trained. When they

are dismissed by two people of opposite sexes at the fifteenth, the boys take short cuts back to the caddy house. They know that their company is not required to point out the views, or to advise against the dangers of tripping over roots.

Baxter, of course, was not aware that this particular hole marked the beginning of many romances. He only knew that his partner mentioned her fatigue and he was prompt to suggest that they quit playing. He was barely aware of the fact that the caddies had trotted off to the golf shop. Nor was he at all cognizant of the fact that Millie deliberately chose, of three roads, that which was longest.

She came to a bench overlooking part of the lake that afforded hazard on the sixteenth.

"I don't know why I should be all in," she said. "Let's sit down while I smoke a cigarette."

"Of course," he agreed.

"Yes, I do, too, know why I'm tired," she said with sudden frankness. "One can't play bridge half the night and be fresh the next day, can one?"

"I shouldn't think so," he agreed.

"And it's so *stupid*," she almost wailed. "I'm not sure whether or not it's wicked—playing for money, I mean—but I know it's silly. Wasting your time, tiring your eyes, smoking too much. I wish I didn't."

She was a very pretty girl, Millie Cragin. She was twenty-eight and looked twenty-eight, but there are those

who maintain that the nearer a woman gets to thirty the lovelier she is. And despite the fact that physically and mentally she gave an impression far different from that of a *jeune fille*, she could, when she chose, assume an appearance of appealing and helpless youth calculated to deceive practically any man.

She looked quite pathetic now as she threw one arm over the back of the bench, and twisted her body until she faced Baxter.

"And it is wicked, too, when you let other people play who can't afford to lose. I felt so sorry for Martha yesterday. I'm sure she can't afford to lose two hundred dollars. It was wrong of me to play with her, don't you think? If she can't afford to lose, I shouldn't do anything that puts her in a position to lose, should I?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It's difficult to believe that Miss Blaisdell would engage in games if she were unable to make good."

"I didn't *say* that, and I certainly didn't mean it," said Millie. "Of course she pays when she loses, but—it's hard for her. The depression—well, it hit her pretty hard. As a matter of fact, bless her, she has had to rely on her broker, a man named Gerrish—Gerald Gerrish—do you know him? A dreadful creature, really. No one ever heard of him until Martha started bringing him around, and he's too impossible. But if he hadn't helped her, given her money, I don't know where she'd be. And then he talked, and that isn't pleasant, is it?"

"I wouldn't know," said Baxter.

"Well, I can assure you that it isn't," said Millie. "When a rotter like that intimates to people that—well, he's dreadful, that's all, and I hope that Martha finds some way to get rid of him."

She waited for the germ to breed in Baxter's mind. Deliberately she had placed it there. But his face was placid, as though he didn't follow the train of thought which she had so carefully laid down.

"I hope she does," he said. "Unpleasant acquaintances are best abandoned."

"I guess so," she said. "Tell me about your work, won't you?"

"Not much to tell," he said. "It's a job, that's all."

Millie gave up. He was perfectly polite, smilingly agreeable, but she was getting nowhere with him. Indeed, she may have got somewhere, but the wrong somewhere with him. He was very far from dumb, this doctor. He might be innocent, but he was not naïve. And he had been able to understand her insinuation against Martha. The fact that he ignored it might merely prove that he was a gentleman, but it might also prove that he resented it.

After all, he'd made a bee line for Martha the first moment he decently could. They knew each other. Bob Lemming might think that memory of old acquaintance had caused Baxter to ask an invitation to Green Point, but Millie Cragin couldn't be fooled on matters of the heart. Peter Baxter might not be in love with Martha Blaisdell, but

he was mightily taken with her. Millie decided to retreat and do so gracefully.

If she were unable to poison his mind against Martha—and in all her feline life she had never wanted to do anything so much—she could at least be certain that she didn't poison him against herself.

"Martha is really wonderful," she said. "You know, she has a serious, a fine side, to her. Lots of girls are nice—you know what I mean—generous, sweet, and all that. But Martha has *character*, and that's a rare thing, I think."

Now Peter Baxter was nobody's fool. He had been vaguely aware that Millie had been attacking Martha, but felt that perhaps he did the dashing blonde injustice. Now, he was sure that he had been unfair. For wasn't she praising Martha, saying the sweetest possible things about her? And Millie made a mental moue, but continued her praise. Being a cat, Millie knew that there were more ways than one of skinning them.

And she was further in Baxter's esteem and liking when they rejoined the others at the Lemming house than she had been in the morning after tennis. And she had learned something. This morning she had been rather confident that Baxter would be an easy victim. Now that she knew—or thought she knew—that he liked Martha, she would not be overconfident. But she'd get him. She always got her man, and this time she wanted her man.

Chapter IX

THERE was much argument, as it came time to leave for the Hyslop party, as to the conveyance to be used.

"Guest or not, Trudie my lamb," said Bob, "I'm not going to be in a position where I have to wait hours for Dan Treman and his scatter-brained wife to decide to come decently home to bed."

"I tell you, Bob, that I just want to look in and dash out," protested Dan.

"You've told me that before, Daniel, my friend," derided Lemming, "and I've hung around until dawn. You and Mrs. Dan will hear the music, and like old fire-horses——"

"Oh, I say," protested Mrs. Dan.

"Amendment carried," laughed Bob. "Like an old fire-horse—that's Dan—with his young and skittish mate—that's you, Mrs. Dan—you'll respond to the whistle—that's the music—and will dash out on that floor and stay there until scrambled eggs and coffee are served at six a. m. And if we all go in one car, I'll have to wait, with my loving but sleepy spouse——"

"Hang it, I'll drive myself," said Treman.

"Which is the point I'm making," said Bob. "And Herbie can drive Martha, and Pete can drive Millie."

And this was the way in which the matter was finally settled. Martha, as Cranston carefully closed the door of the car upon her, smiled tenderly at his care. It had been a sudden decision she had made, and she had arrived at that decision through not too admirable processes of thought.

A week ago, before Trudie had hinted and Bob had beaten about the bush, she had been possessed of a feeling of security. Occasionally, hearing people talk about the depression, she had vaguely wondered how it was that she seemed not to suffer. An occasional insistence from her common sense had made her resolve to question Gerrish, but she had always postponed the matter. Everything was all right; she didn't understand business; Gerrish was honest and able—if there were any danger he'd tell her about it. So she calmed herself, knowing, deep down in her heart, that everything wasn't all right.

Then, like a bombshell had come the hint from Trudie following the disquieting talk with Bob. She had understood instantly matters that had faintly puzzled her of late: little innuendoes about Gerrish, the occasional lift of an eyebrow, the knowing smiles sent her way. And although she had put up a brave front to Gerrish, her heart had been sick with terror.

To be poor; to be dependent upon one's friends; to be too proud to accept dependence and to find no way of earning a living in a world where even the competent were hard-pressed nowadays.

The realities of life, from which she had been always sheltered by money, loomed harshly before her. And so, almost before she realized it—because we flee from danger down the nearest road without asking where it may end—she found herself decided to marry Cranston.

Now—save for the pleasant interlude that must intervene between becoming engaged and being wedded—she had accomplished her own rescue from despair. Cranston had proposed and she had accepted him. He knew the scandal that Gerrish had started and it made no difference to him. She frowned as she came to this point in her thoughts. If that scandal continued it might make a difference. If Gerrish fulfilled his threat over the telephone—but she wouldn't think of Gerrish. Bert would protect her; Bert loved her; Bert would stop Gerrish.

Only, and this was frightening, Bert Cranston might not mind, too much, hushed and muttered scandal. But if Gerrish made the matter public, if Gerrish actually brought suit against her, saying the things he threatened to say, Bert Cranston would—well, it would *murder* him, she told herself. He had, she knew, great pride in his family, his name. To marry a girl who had been publicly smirched—oh, he'd do it, but shame would break him. And she, in very chivalry, would be compelled to withdraw from the engagement. . . . Oh, Gerrish must be stopped. But how?

But as she turned toward Cranston as he entered the car beside her, nothing of this was evident in her manner.

She was lovelier, Cranston thought, than she had been since he knew her. At dinner she had worn the same look of youth that she had had when he watched her at the pool a week ago.

His arms suddenly ached to enfold her. But she had been shy this afternoon, and he would not press his attention upon her. Her kiss—he had snatched one on the way from the polo—had been the kiss of a young girl. And he would be content with that kind of caress for the present. Poor kid. That swine Gerrish had upset her, and upon that turmoil of mind had followed turmoil of the heart. For Cranston could not doubt that his own sudden passion for her was fully returned by her.

No, he would force no affection upon her. In a day or so she would become used to their engagement, and no one, looking upon her face, could doubt that she could meet love with love.

“Happy?” he asked.

“Happy,” she replied.

“I think Trudie suspected,” he said.

“I’m sure she did,” Martha replied.

“Didn’t ask you, did she?”

She shook her head.

“No, but—I think she guesses.”

“Mind?” he asked.

Again she shook her head.

“Neither do I,” he told her, “only—I’d rather like to keep it to ourselves for a while. Wouldn’t you?”

"Of course," she said.

She heard him sigh gently, and then, for miles, they drove in silence. She liked this. She liked people who couldn't express their emotions but who—you could be certain—felt them the more because of that very inability to speak of them.

Millie Cragin had watched them drive off. She was as quick of perception as anyone, and if Trudie Lemming suspected, Millie was sure. And she was pleased. Peter Baxter was capturing her fancy more than she had imagined any man could do. And hearts were caught upon the rebound. If Martha had become engaged to Cranston, Millie hoped they'd make no secret of it. Baxter would get over his sudden fancy for Cranston's fiancée, and would turn—ah, Millie would direct that turning, she assured herself.

"I haven't the faintest idea where we're headed for," said Baxter, as, Millie beside him in the little roadster which he had driven to Green Point, they started off.

"The Hyslops," she said.

"I know that. I mean, I know the name of our prospective hosts. But where they live——"

"I'll direct you," said Millie. "It's only a twenty minute drive."

"When who drives?" he asked.

"When I drive, and I'm slow and careful," she replied.

"Then it's twenty minutes, for I'm that way, too," he said.

"I wish you'd tell me how you happened to start your clinic, Pete," she said. "I asked you this afternoon, and you cut me short."

"I didn't mean to be rude," he said. "Nothing to tell. Just went into it, that's all. Stuck to it because I like it."

"You could have an uptown practice," she said. "I mean—one that pays."

He laughed.

"I'm satisfied with what I have," he told her.

"You're satisfied with what you *are*," she corrected him.

"What do you mean? That I'm conceited?"

"Not at all. Only—you're doing something decent and fine and helpful—Trudie has told me something about what you do. Bob told her. I think you're great, Pete. And I can appreciate greatness more than most people because—well, I'm not great myself. I'm little—and cheap."

"That is, of course, the most ridiculous kind of untruth, Millie," he averred.

"I wish it were," she said. "I'm a cat, Pete. Most women are, I think, but not all of them know it. I know it. I can be pretty mean, when I feel like it. I was mean this afternoon. I hinted at scandal about Martha, and I didn't make it very clear that I *knew* there wasn't a word of truth in the scandal. I'm making it clear now, Pete."

"I think you're pretty swell, Millie," he said uncomfortably.

"And now that's off my chest, I'll just revert to being the kitten I like to be," she said with a giggle. "And kit-

tens are curious as well as sly, you know. I want to know all about your work."

Millie didn't have too many sincere moments, but she had one now, and Baxter recognized that her interest was genuine enough. He scattered about the various phases of his work, the rest of the brief ride. But when he came in sight of the Hyslop estate he broke off abruptly.

"Where on earth does one park?" he asked in dismay.

For half a mile on either side of the main road motors were parked. Motorcycle and mounted police directed traffic. Thousands of sightseers, anxious to see the reputed great as they passed through the gates of the ground, surged backward and forward, at imminent risk to life and limb.

Slowly, through the narrow lane left to arriving cars, he steered the machine. Millie was sitting bolt-upright now, in that peculiar excitement which attacks the most veteran of party-goers when something more spectacular than usual is being staged. Baxter, who hadn't been to a party in several years, felt excitement, too.

The grounds of the Hyslops were brilliantly illuminated. One caught glimpses, as one drove up the wide avenue beyond the entrance gates, of orange and blue and white marquees. At one point one heard the blare of a military band; a few hundred yards further the strains of a dance orchestra filtered through the noise of milling thousands.

Thousands! The number was no exaggeration. At least five hundred motors were parked in the main road outside, and at least a hundred more had preceded Baxter

and Millie up the drive, were circling back to the road now, while scores of machines were behind them.

"You can't leave the car here; you'll have to park it and walk *miles*," said Millie. "And I'd ruin my shoes if I walked back with you."

"I wouldn't think of it," he assured her. "But where'll I find you?"

She laughed helplessly.

"Heaven knows, Pete, in this crush. But I'll go to the dance floor—if there's more than one you'll have to look them all over—and I'll wait for you to show up."

"I'll battle my way back if I have to call for the militia," he laughed. And with that he left her.

It was fully twenty-five minutes later before, having managed to park his car, and secure a lift on the running board of an arriving machine, he arrived at the Hyslop main house again. He had old-fashioned ideas, and one of them was that one should not enjoy hospitality while unacquainted with one's hosts. So he went in search of Mr. and Mrs. Hyslop, found them with their daughter in the far end of a great baronial hall, presented himself, and then, conscience clear, went forth in search of Millie.

He found himself upon a wide lawn, tree-studded, that sloped gently to a cove. Couples sat on benches, in chairs or even, reckless youth that cares not for night dew, upon the grass. To the left of the cove was barely visible through the trees a great dancing space, black with moving figures, which were men, and gayly-colored with the fig-

ures of women. At the right was a stage, where sang now as lovely a soprano as he had ever heard.

No one was listening to the voice, and it could be barely heard above the incessant clamor of voices. Baxter, who loved music, edged nearer to the singer. He wondered, idly, how much the singer had been paid for her part in the presentation of the Hyslop girl to society. Two hundred, five hundred—perhaps a thousand dollars? And he wondered that the singer, considering the way she was being ignored, bothered to sing above a whisper. But she was an artist, and an artist's duty is to herself, not to her audience. If she sang, she would sing her best.

For a moment he was tempted to cry, "Silence," and force these people, in very shame, to give their attention to the soprano. But that would be useless. If people hadn't good manners. . . . And the young—and nine-tenths of the guests were very young—are heedless. They didn't want to hear singing. They wanted to dance, and stroll about, and flirt, and make merry.

He turned reluctantly to the left, in search of Millie. He passed great supper tents where, he knew, food would be served until breakfast time. He wondered that the throng of curious outside the gates did not, in some overt way, show their resentment of this great waste. Of course, it was better that money be spent than that money be hoarded. Nevertheless, in times like these, it might be difficult to prove to the man in the street the economic soundness of expenditures for parties.

"Pete Baxter!" His hand was seized and he looked into the broadly grinning countenance of Tom Hanley, who had played centre with him at college. "I'm a son-of-a-gun! Talking about you the other day, wondering where in time you were. Knew you'd gone in for charity clinics and hanged if I thought I'd run into you in a jam like this. Eileen, this is Pete Baxter. My wife, Pete."

His progress to the dancing floor was a series of interruptions, loud exclamations, insistence that he look old friends up, and hurried farewells. He wouldn't have been human if he hadn't flushed, over and over again, with pleasure.

It was good to be liked, good to be remembered. And he *had* ignored old friendships. People like Hanley and Robison and Clarkson were worth while. He'd have to look them up.

He arrived finally, on the edge of the dance floor. Vainly he looked for Millie. But there, swirling by him, graceful of body and lovely with a faint flush and parted lips, was Martha. She caught his eye and her slim fingers waved a salutation. He didn't recognize her escort, but a moment later saw Bert Cranston dancing by with some girl he didn't know. And then, having circled the floor, Martha paused before him.

"Sorry," she said to her escort, a too-plump youth who wheezed as he danced and panted as he paused, "but this is Mr. Baxter, to whom I promised——"

"—ta know ya," said the plump young man. Instantly he cut in on another pretty girl.

"A little white lie," said Martha. "But I'm growing old, I fear me. I've been ten minutes with that impossible youth, and no one cut in to rescue me, so—anyway, I had promised something to you."

"What?" he asked.

"I can't think at the moment," she giggled, "but it will come to mind later. What a crush! My skirt torn, my shoes stepped on, and my patience frayed. And so thirsty. Why does dancing in the open air make one thirstier than the same exercise indoors?"

"Does it?" asked Baxter.

"It does tonight," she said. "And if you want to be a rescuing angel, you'll lead me to some place where I can get a glass of water."

So slight a service she asked of him, who all his life would yearn to do her favors. He gave her his arm, and shoved a not too easily achieved way through the crowd. The press was becoming terrific.

"Where's Millie?" she asked.

He shrugged.

"I had to go back to the road to leave my car; she said she'd wait for me by the dance floor."

"That means anywhere within ten city blocks," laughed Martha, "and probably some swain has taken her for a bite to eat. I never saw such a crowd in my life. I don't think there's ever been such a big party—private party. I mean. But old John Hyslop knows there won't be many parties this year, so he's giving an enormous one. He's

just asked *everyone*. Here, don't rush me by this tent. I know there's refreshment for the thirsty here."

They peered inside. Two hundred people were packed in a tent made to hold half that number.

"By the time I escape, after a drink of water, I'll be hotter and thirstier than now," she said.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll get it."

He saw an opening, squirmed through, exchanged laughing apologies with half a dozen people, and emerged, in a minute or so, to find Martha where he had left her. But two men were with her, and the voice of one of them was raised.

They were in dinner jackets, and there was nothing about their appearance to indicate that they were anything but guests, although a more sophisticated man than Baxter might have guessed them as plain-clothes detectives, here to watch the jewels of the guests.

"You Martha Blaisdell?" one of them was asking.

Baxter frowned. He might have said *Miss* Martha Blaisdell. He noticed, too, that several other people had paused and were staring. He edged nearer to the girl. He had paused, a few feet away, to permit her to finish her conversation, but now he felt apprehension.

"Well, I'm here to serve you a summons and complaint in the action of Gerald Gerrish against you."

Eyebrows lifted; people began talking quickly, loudly, to cover her embarrassment and their own. The man raised his voice even more.

"This is an action brought by the plaintiff to recover money advanced to you on your promise to marry," cried the man.

There was no one within a radius of fifty feet who didn't hear the words. And Baxter dropped the glass of water and stepped forward. He gripped the papers that the man extended to Martha.

"Hey, you, what do you think——"

Baxter cut short his words.

"And what do *you* think? That you can serve legal summons on a Sunday? You get out of here—quietly—now—or I'll have you put out." He raised his hand minatorily. "No, I won't *have* you put out. I'll put you out myself."

For a moment the two men surveyed his lean figure, tense and ready. Then the speaker laughed uneasily.

"Sorry, I didn't realize it was after midnight." He looked at the watch upon his wrist. "By gosh, it *is* Sunday, isn't it? Well, say, I thought sure it wasn't twelve o'clock."

"The times are very hard, aren't they?" asked Baxter unexpectedly.

The two men stared at him.

"What do you mean? Sure they are," replied the man who had done the talking for the two.

"They must be. A man must need money badly to do so vile a thing," said Baxter. "What do you get for serving a summons? This kind of summons, where you are

paid to insult the receiver of the summons, where the receiver is a woman, and where the suit is foully false in its inception, where it is blackmail inspired?"

"Hey, you, go slow," said the summons-server. "That's slander. Mr. Gerrish would have a nice case of action against you if I told him you said he was a blackmailer."

"Then tell him," said Baxter. "Tell him that Dr. Peter Baxter, of St. John's Clinic, says that serving such a summons, in such a case, is the filthiest kind of blackmail, and let him sue me—if he dares. And now—you go."

The fifty people who had heard the process-server's statement heard also Peter Baxter's challenge. Oh, it was gallant of him, thought Martha. Only—chivalry and gallantry cannot protect anyone from the throwing of filth. And that was what Gerry Gerrish had begun to do—throw filth.

"Thanks, Peter," she said, as they moved away.

Chapter X

LETTY TORRANCE was neither a prude nor a busybody. She was, in fact, a nice enough girl to deserve having Bert Cranston as a brother. She was a well-bred, tactful, high-minded person, but she was, after all, a sister to an unmarried younger brother. And since ever a saucy baggage cast a first sheep's eye at a lone man, sisters have been fussy about younger brothers.

They drop the fiction which they have permitted their husbands to believe, that woman is the weaker sex and man the stronger. Not a bit of it. Any man—if he is a brother—will fall victim to the brazen wiles and unscrupulous designs of the first hussy that comes along. He must be harried into cover, as a hen harries her chick; the woman must be defied, frowned upon, and told to take her deceitful blandishments elsewhere.

Any woman would have had a hard time winning Letty Torrance to the belief that she was worthy to marry Herbert Cranston. But a girl concerning whom the tongue of scandal wagged had practically no chance at all. And Letty was not the type to sit at home and brood, to wait for her brother to visit her before she advised or berated him.

Sim Torrance, flushed and happy from a brilliant eighteen holes, screamed to her from his bedroom.

"Took Chappy Chapman six and five and made him *like* it," he bragged. "Doubled up on the second nine and copped. Was I a sport? Am I always a sport when I can feel the head of the club, if you know what I mean?"

"I know what you mean," called Letty.

"Well, he wanted an extra fifty on the eighteenth, and said I, 'Sure thing, doubles for birds.' And Letty, I holed a mashie from off the green and if you could hear Chappy scream. I can think," his voice became deliberate, "of no sweeter music in the world than the bleat of Chappy when the breaks come my way. Hey, what are you doing?"

"Packing," she replied.

Sim Torrance unwound himself from the chair upon which he had hurled his tall body. He always twined himself around something; he couldn't sit on a bench without twisting his limbs about its legs. From the doorway he stared at his charming wife.

"Listen, bird-like and bride-like one, what are you packing those bags for?"

"For a trip, my perspicacious hero," she replied.

Quick alarm showed on the features of her husband. He was a home-loving man, and the fact that he had a home in Aiken, in Santa Barbara, as well as in Bar Harbor and Long Island, in no wise diminished that love. In whatever home he was he wished to remain until he moved on to the next one, and woe betide anyone who suggested moving on at the wrong season.

Except for a biennial trip to Europe, and an occasional night spent in a New York hotel after the theatre, or en route from one place to another, he slept always in a home.

"I can't go on any trip, Letty, my princess," he said.

"My king, no one asked you," she retorted.

No couple—not even the Lemmings—were more devoted than this pair, and when they called each other by extraordinarily high-flown terms of endearment, they used these terms through no sarcasm. They just did it, and the laughter of ten years had not stopped them a whit.

"Leaving the royal consort, eh?" he demanded.

She straightened up and waved Nellie the maid from the room.

"Bert is making a fat-head of himself," she stated.

"Gad, that's swell news," grinned Sim. "He's been the pattern so long that I like to know his foot can slip—nothing serious, is it?"

"Girl," said Letty.

"I gathered as much. I didn't think the old boy had signed the wrong name to a check. Night-club? No, he wouldn't let himself in for anything notorious. Then what, my dear?"

"Girl named Martha Blaisdell. Ever hear of her?"

Her husband shook his head.

"Neither did I—until yesterday. Bert had the fidgets last week down here and I knew it spelled girl. Then that old hen Sarah Prentiss phoned, and then so did Myrtle Craigie——"

"Copper anything they say," advised Sim.

"I know. Scandal-mongering old busybodies. But—I did some phoning myself. I got Brink Towler on the phone—Brink wouldn't lie to me, you know."

"Ought I to know that?" chuckled her husband.

"No—but it's true. In the dim days Brink had a sneaker for me. Well, he told me that he'd talk to Bert. And he said that the scandal was not true——"

"Scandal, eh?"

"There's gossip that some filthy man named Gerrish has been paying her bills. He started it."

"I'd like to practice niblick shots on his head," said Sim.

"I know. But—well, Brink was panicked that he'd admitted he'd even heard her name, so don't ever tell Bert. And then I called up a couple of other girls—and well, she's gossiped about—plenty. And you know Bert. It's around that he's crazy for her, and you know that if Bert's name is connected with a woman's it's *because* he's crazy for her. He doesn't give them a tumble, you know that, Sim. And I've got to save him."

"But if Brink says it isn't true——"

"So does Trudie Lemming."

"Well, isn't that enough? Trudie wouldn't stick up for any wrong'un."

"I don't imagine she's really *wrong*," said Letty. "But Bert would die if his wife was talked about. He may think he wouldn't, but—he will. And I'm off to New

York, and out to Trudie's in the morning, to put a stop to it."

Sim pursed his lips.

"Doesn't sound like you, Letty."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Not to give the girl a chance for her alley. I mean, if *she's* right, and being given a wrong break——"

"If it were anyone in the world but Bert, I'd agree with you, Sim."

"You're making Bert out a bit of a cad, aren't you? Can't he stick by a girl when she needs sticking by?"

"That's what I want to stop, Sim," she explained. "If he *loves* her—all right. He'll be unhappy, but I'll side with the girl. But if it's just chivalry——"

"You don't mean that, Letty," said Sim shrewdly.

She blushed faintly.

"I guess I don't, Sim. You see, it's so hard to make even you understand. Bert will do the right thing. But I don't want him miserable doing it. To think that a Cranston's wife is gossiped about! I tell you, it would embitter his whole life. Bless him, he can't help it. He isn't a snob, but—the Cranstons are—the Cranstons. There's never been a scandal——"

"By gosh, I've a darned good mind to kick one up, then," commented Sim. "Mrs. Sim Torrance, once a holy Cranston, finds husband is gang leader and rum-runner. How would he like that?"

"He'd hate it," admitted Letty promptly. "Sim, be-

loved, I'm not siding with Bert. It's a weakness, maybe a grave defect in character. But he's over thirty and too old to change. I wish he were different. But he's so swell in other ways——"

"Are you telling me?" grunted Sim. "The Torrances would be on their uppers if your brother hadn't seen me through the panic. He's swell in about every way——"

"And if he has one defect—let's not despise him for it," pleaded Letty. "The grandest brother—and so I don't want him to make a marriage that will be unhappy. So I'm going to New York."

"And I don't know whether to wish you luck or not," said her husband. "Let's—let's hope for the best."

"Which is all I want to occur," said Letty.

That Martha Blaisdell was a designing little cat was an idea that had been pretty well dissipated by a telephone talk with Trudie Lemming. Trudie Lemming's judgment of character was sound. Here, then, was a nice girl, with whom quite obviously, Bert was in love, but who unfortunately had a bad reputation.

That sounded pretty awful, but it was the truth. Mean, vindictive and trouble-loving as the Craigie and Prentiss women were, although they shook hands with scandal every time they opened their mouths, and patted libel on the back each time they wrote a letter, they were not liars. They didn't manufacture lies of whole cloth. There was a good sound reasonable bow for every barbed and poisonous shaft they let loose.

Well, Letty was as good a judge of character as Trudie. If the girl were all Trudie said—she might decide that it was time for Bert to get over his delusions of grandeur about the Cranstons. Anyway, there was no use thinking any more about the matter until she reached Long Island.

She arrived at the Grand Central on Sunday morning. A wire en route to her Long Island caretaker assured the presence of a car and chauffeur, and she was looking for his familiar face when a feminine voice greeted her. She looked into the face of Dolly Oliver.

They kissed, rather coolly. Dolly was a younger edition of Sarah Prentiss, was, indeed, a niece of that stalwart old backbiter.

“What on earth brings you to town, Letty?” asked Dolly.

“And what brings you to the Grand Central on a Sunday morning not too far from dawn?” countered Letty.

“Mother,” said Dolly. “Mother *will* summer in Lenox and I must see her every week or so. Don’t look at me; I’m a wreck. Haven’t been to bed. Left the Hyslops party—I made mother see that I *couldn’t* miss that—at five and motored into town. Changed my clothes and took a bath. That’s all. Thank heaven I’ve a room on the train and can nap. And if I fall asleep during dinner mother will think I’m a good girl and keep early hours. And am I filled with gossip?”

“So?” Letty was indifferent. Her maid had found the chauffeur, her bags were being put in her car, and she healthily craved breakfast.

"I'll say *so*," said Dolly. "Your brother picked himself a star performer when he decided to give a girl a rush."

"Now just what does that mean?" demanded Letty. She could fear for Bert, and be alarmed by what people told her, but even the old vixens of the telephone would be put harshly in their places when Letty met them face to face.

"Where have you been? The town's alive with it. Broker named Gerrish——"

"I've heard that filthy, malicious lying tale," said Letty.

"But you can't have heard what happened last night. Oh, ten people that I know *intimately* heard every word. Some brute of a man gave her a summons. Mind, at two this morning, Sunday morning. And he screamed, so that everyone could hear, that it was a summons in a suit to recover money given her by Gerrish on her promise to marry. Imagine! Girls don't get money from men on a promise to marry—you know. She's walked out on him—she's after your brother——"

"Who will take care of Mr. Gerrish and his suit, I imagine," said Letty. She could visualize the unhappy girl. A girl that Bert liked. A nice girl. Trudie Lemming said so, and Trudie would know. It was an outrage, and just too bad about Bert and his finicky standards. When people began to talk about the girl to whom her brother paid attention, then it was up to her brother to pay the girl *more* attention. Hang it, before Bert was a—well, snob—he was surely a gentleman.

"He didn't have to. There was the divinest man there—Peter Baxter. Used to be wrestling champion—anyway, he broke Dan Treman's leg—well, he stepped right up gave those men plenty. Said they had no right to serve a summons on Sunday morning, that they were blackmailers and he'd put them out if they didn't go, and their employer Gerrish could sue him and he'd prove everything he said."

She drew a long breath.

"I tell you, Doctor Baxter is a hero. Everybody is mad about him. He was grand, and everyone's going to be his patient, and give Herbie my love, won't you?"

She joined the last minute rush to the Lenox train, and Letty thoughtfully followed her maid to the car. She asked to be driven to the Canterbury, where she ate a leisurely breakfast. Then she stepped in her car again and ordered the chauffeur to take her to Green Point, to the Lemming house.

And at precisely a quarter to ten she brushed aside the Lemming maid and insisted on waking Trudie. She couldn't wait any longer to get more news of whatever on earth had happened last night, and about what sort of a dreadful tangle had enmeshed her brother. But, oddly, she was now pretty well disposed toward Martha.

Chapter XI

TRUDIE LEMMING stared at the intruder. She buried her face, flushed with sleep, in her pillow, and from its depths came muffled but vehement protest.

"You go away from here, Letty Torrance. There'll be newspaper headlines tomorrow morning about the Long Island matron who slew in defense of her right to slumber."

"It will be a double killing then," giggled Letty. "If you think I've raced all the way from Bar Harbor to Long Island to watch your gentle slumbers, you're crazy. You sit right up in bed and tell me everything that a loving sister ought to be told about her brother."

"Three words will do it: mind your business," yawned Trudie.

"I'll consider them said, and you consider them ignored. Now tell me all about Martha Blaisdell, and what she is doing to baby Bert, and what's the secret of her charm that makes other men do battle for her in the wee small hours?"

Trudie sat bolt upright, her eyes wide.

"Now don't tell me you know about last night. You *couldn't*. Why, it only happened at two o'clock and you were on a train then." Her face showed quick apprehension. "Don't tell me it's in the morning papers."

"I met Dolly Oliver in the Grand Central."

"That explains everything," said Trudie. "Hand me a mirror, there's a darling, and some lipstick."

She busied herself for a moment with the essentials of makeup; then she rang the bell which would summon her breakfast. Settling herself more comfortably, she looked challengingly at her visitor.

"Shall I break it to you gently or by degrees?"

"I'll take it straight," said Letty. Her face paled slightly.

"If your brother hasn't proposed to Martha Blaisdell, your Aunt Trudie can no longer read the signs and portents. And I, for one, Letty, am terribly in favor of it."

Letty leaned back in her chair.

"That seems pretty definite. It shows what you think of the girl."

"I told you over the telephone what I thought of her," said Trudie. "I know how you feel, Letty. I suppose if I had a brother that had fallen in love with a girl about whom there was chatter, I'd be a female Lochinvar and come dashing to the rescue. But not after I'd met Martha. She's all right, Letty my dear."

"I've never really doubted that," said Letty. "It was just a matter of—well, you know Bert. I simply don't want him doing something that will make him miserable."

"Sometimes not doing a thing makes you more miserable than doing it," commented Trudie.

The maid entered with a tray, which she placed in Trudie's lap.

"Coffee?" asked Trudie.

Letty shook her head.

Her hostess drank her orange juice, poured her coffee, buttered a roll and bit it avidly.

"I should think nurses would eat all the time and weigh tons," she said. "Any time I've not had enough sleep I simply stuff myself. If the sight of a healthy woman devouring a woodchopper's breakfast is too much for you——"

Letty smiled.

"Nothing is too much for me but delay. Hustle through that breakfast and tell me everything."

Trudie drank her cup of coffee and toyed with an egg. Despite her vauntings, that lovely figure had not been achieved and maintained by overeating.

"I'll make it brief," she promised. "Last week-end Herbie met Martha here. I've never seen anything so rapid in my life. He came, he saw, she conquered. You know your baby brother. Healthy man's normal enjoyment of pretty women. That's Herbie all the years I've known him. But not so this time. If he'd carried a placard announcing in big letters that he was in love with Martha he couldn't have made it any plainer. I mean, people don't tease your brother as a general rule. The lad has too much dignity. But I promise you that everybody kidded him, in a gentle way, last week. It was one of those things that it would have been more noticeable to ignore than not. The great Herbie Cranston, sighed over

by maidens and their mamas for a dozen seasons, captured at last. And I loved it. You don't know Martha, because she's lived abroad most of her life, but I've known her off and on, for years. She's swell."

"It seems to me I've heard you say that before," said Letty dryly. "What I want to know is the talk about her."

Trudie prepared herself another cup of coffee. She looked at her guest inquiringly.

"Sure you won't have a cup? Well, for some reason or other Martha's father had acquired a man of affairs named Gerald Gerrish. The kind of man that wouldn't be seen on Sunday morning without striped trousers and a black coat and a topper. And you know, looking at him, that he never wore that kind of a costume until he was thirty. Well, Martha's parents died. She remained abroad a year or so, letting Gerrish handle the estate. She came back to America and he began taking her around. You know—he was presentable. He didn't look or act as if he quite belonged, but I guess he was pretty useful to carry coats and that sort of thing. Has a wife somewhere, but apparently they've been separated a long time. And Martha took him everywhere. People aren't as fussy as they used to be before the great depression. I know a lot of men who are invited around simply because they can afford to pay for dinners and theatre tickets and know enough to send flowers. Jimmy Munson even put Gerrish up for the Course."

She pushed her tray away, and Letty rose and picked

up the remains of breakfast and placed them on the table. Trudie lighted a cigarette.

"It's hard to explain Gerrish," she said thoughtfully. "He's a climber. He's suddenly found himself on more or less intimate terms with the class of people he'd never known before. Martha had practically opened all doors to him. And it was too much for him. He wanted to show that he'd been around, wanted to be patronizing. I don't know whether he drank or what. All I know is that suddenly I ran into a lot of talk about Martha and Gerrish, nasty talk. No one seemed to know definitely where it had started, but the general impression seems to be that Gerrish was the source of it. He didn't *say* anything specific, but the impression got abroad that if he wasn't having an affair with Martha, he was certainly entitled to it under the rules. He was giving her money to live on.

"Now I don't know just how much Martha heard of the gossip. I suspect that only last week-end it came to her ears. This I know: last Sunday night at the Ministry Gerrish made some sort of a scene. People who were there told me about it, said that Gerrish had been drinking and loudly stated that he had never told anyone he had kept Martha or something like that. One of those denials that would make it certain that the thing he denied would be spread abroad. I imagine there'd been some sort of a split-up between Martha and Gerrish earlier. Anyway, your brother Herbie was there and led Mr. Gerrish quietly out."

"What sort of beast can he be?" cried Letty.

Trudie shrugged.

"That type of man hates the people who've given him a lift. You've seen people, securely placed now, who don't even speak to the ones who got them their first invitation. But he's worse than that. I guess he thought it would enhance his value somehow if he could sneer at Martha, or if he could make people believe that a person like Martha would condescend to him but it's bad enough to know that he exists without trying to comprehend him. It makes me a trifle ill just to talk about him. And now you know everything there is to know. But before you take a stand with Herbie I'd advise you to meet the girl."

"I certainly will," promised Letty. "But who's the man that came to her rescue last night?"

"The nicest youth that's been around in years," replied Trudie enthusiastically. "Dr. Peter Baxter, and he has freckles and red hair and used to play football. He put Dan Treman in the hospital years ago. Bob used to know him and he rang up yesterday and asked if he could come out." She chuckled. "He'd hardly got here when I knew that he'd come to see Martha. He is as much in love with her as your brother, and more than that cannot be said. And he's attractive. Not a pretty man—I guess you'd have to call him homely. But he's so clean and decent and merry—well, that hard-boiled baby, Millie Cragin, took one look and screamed that she wanted him. She's had less than twenty-four hours in which to strut her stuff, but you know

how much Millie can usually do in an afternoon and evening. But I would say that she hasn't reached first base with Peter."

"What is this place, a matrimonial agency?" laughed Letty.

"Cupid's bower, no less," giggled Trudie. "I have to bathe and make myself beautiful against the day. Herbie is on the next floor on the east corner. Dash up, lose your battle gracefully, and tell him that tennis will begin when he's ready. And when you come back here, I'll introduce you to Martha."

Letty smiled mischievously.

"That brutal, suspicious husband of mine is hundreds of miles away. I can see Miss Blaisdell any time. I think I'd rather see your doctor first."

"If any married woman influences his young life with counsel and sympathy, that matron is going to be the lovely Mrs. Lemming," said Trudie.

"Oh-ho," said Letty.

"Don't be an idiot," smiled Trudie.

"I won't," promised Letty, and went through the door. As she ascended the stairs she smiled broadly at the idea of Trudie or herself ever casting an eye in any direction save that in which their husbands were to be found. Nevertheless, she was curious to meet young Baxter.

She pounded on her brother's door and he called to her to come in. He had just finished his toilet, and was adjusting a tie before a mirror. He smelled pleasantly of witch-hazel and soap.

"Well, for heaven's sake, 'one of the children ill? Brought him down here to the doctor?"

She approached him and presented him with a sisterly kiss.

"Mmm," she murmured. "You must tell Sim the name of that soap—or is it perfume?"

"You know perfectly darn well I don't use scent," he told her. "What pleasant breeze brings you?"

She plunged right into the heart of matters. Between her and her brother existed an accord that disdained lengthy approaches, beating about the bush.

"I heard talk and I came down," she said.

He pulled on a sport coat. In the long mirror he surveyed himself. He passed muster. The white flannels were impeccable and the tennis shoes were spotless. Deliberately, he turned and eyed his sister.

"Talk, eh? About Martha Blaisdell of course."

She nodded, and took a cigarette from her case. He snapped a briquet for her.

"She's the girl I love and she promised yesterday to marry me," he said.

"That being so, there seems nothing for me to say," said Letty. "I'll congratulate you now, and when I've seen the paragon my congratulations will be twenty times as enthusiastic."

He smiled tenderly upon her.

"Always a swell girl, Letty. But you came down here to advance argument, didn't you?"

"There's no argument possible when my brother has become engaged," she replied.

"Which sounds swell, old dear," he laughed, "but isn't sensible. What is it, Letty? The scandal?"

"You're engaged," she said flatly.

"But if I weren't?"

"Straight from the shoulder?" she asked.

"That's the way it's always been between us."

"Then I'd ask you to be very sure that you could face talk, to be certain that you wouldn't be made miserable by the fact that there has been and might continue to be gossip about your wife."

Slowly he lighted a cigarette.

"I must be pretty much of a rotter," he said.

She shook her head vehemently.

"Nothing of the sort. But you know, Bert, how you've always been. You've thought the Cranstons were people set apart, sacrosanct. As a boy you worried if I played with the wrong children."

"A snob, eh?"

"That's about it, Bert."

"I've changed," he said. "I know what I used to be like. If a man didn't belong to the Course or the Mallet he didn't really exist. But I've got all over that. For the last six years I've been spending half my time with men who never saw a dinner coat, and I prefer them to my older friends. I don't think of myself as a Cranston any longer; I think of myself as a man with a job, a great many jobs,

to do. And I know that there are men doing the same kind of jobs who are much better than I am and they've never been in a New York club."

"You're swell, Bert," said Letty. "It hurts me to hear you talk about yourself. Nobody could be grander. But, Bert, there are things beyond snobbery. There are standards. You demand so much. How will it be if there's ugly rumor, nasty insinuation about your wife?"

"Inasmuch as the rumor and insinuation are false, they're not going to bother me," he replied.

"If you're sure of that," she began.

He interrupted her.

"I was never so sure of anything in my life."

She leaped to her feet and threw her arms about him.

"Take me right downstairs. I can't wait another minute to meet my new sister-in-law," she cried.

He looked at her affectionately, a whimsical smile on his lips.

"I must have been pretty much of an insufferable prig most of my life, Letty," he said. "That you should think I'd let a lying rumor come between me and the girl I love——"

"But I was wrong in thinking that," cried Letty. "And let's not talk about it. You're swell, just as I've always known you were. Take me downstairs to meet Martha."

Arms about each other's waists they descended the stairs and knocked on Trudie's door. In response to her invitation they entered her room. She stared at them almost as though they were strangers.

"Send for Martha," said Letty. "I can't wait another minute to meet her."

Trudie made no reply. She merely handed Cranston a folded piece of paper. He read it, white-faced, and handed it to his sister.

"Dearest Trudie," it read. "I'm leaving. If Gerrish is suing me, I won't drag Bert through such a thing. And I haven't the heart to tell him. You tell him, darling. Tell him that I wouldn't marry any man with a filthy scandal like this hanging over me. Love. Martha."

Letty looked up from the hastily-written scrawl.

"I haven't met your Martha," she said slowly, "but it seems to me, Bert, that something ought to be done about Gerrish."

"Plenty will be done about him," said Cranston grimly. He turned to Trudie. "What time did she leave?"

"Hours ago, I imagine," Trudie replied. "I thought she was sleeping. But I just sent my maid up to wake her, to tell her that Letty was here, and she found this note on the dresser, addressed to me."

"But someone must have heard her leave," protested Cranston. "She didn't have a car and she had to telephone for a taxi."

"What difference does it make when she left, or how much noise she made?" asked his sister impatiently.

But Trudie caught the import of his words.

"Don't be ridiculous, Herbie," she admonished. "You're afraid that Martha did something reckless—in despair—

in unhappiness? She's not that kind. I never knew anyone more level-headed. She's gone home. She just feels she can't face anyone."

"She'll face me," said Cranston. He looked at Letty. "I'm going in after her," he said. "I'll bring her back here. You'll talk to her, won't you, Letty? You—you'll tell her that—she mustn't be absurd, that nothing a swine like Gerrish says or does can make the slightest difference?"

His sister felt years older. He was, in his sudden panic, like a little boy appealing to an adult in circumstances beyond his ability to meet. And she smiled at him.

"I think, Bert," she told him, "that you'll be able to persuade her. If you feel, when you see her," she added, "as you feel now."

"I'll always feel this way," he said. And without further word he left the room.

The doubt that had been in his mind persisted. Trudie's assurance was not convincing. Martha was proud, and one could never tell to what depths of desperation pride could drive a girl. But the butler, his bland face showing no surprise at the question, told him that Miss Blaisdell had taken a taxi to the Green Point station several hours ago. Certainly, then she had not walked out into the Sound. . . .

Thirty minutes of driving made him cooler. Martha wasn't a coward; she wouldn't run away from a difficulty. A thing like Gerrish couldn't make her contemplate rash-

ness. She'd merely been chivalrous, given Cranston a way out of an embarrassing situation if he wanted one.

But he didn't want one; over and over again he assured himself that. And it wasn't quite generous of Martha to assume that he did. But bless her, she had done what seemed to her the fair and decent thing. Only—and his lips lost their grimness—he must make Martha understand that the man she loved wasn't a fair-weather lover.

He avoided, by great good fortune, arrest for speeding, and arrived before her apartment house in less than an hour. To the hallboy who wished to announce him he said that he was expected, and stepped into the elevator. If Martha had mistaken pride enough to run away from Trudie Lemming's house, she might well have enough of the same quality to refuse to see him if he were announced. But if he just rang the bell of her apartment. . . .

He pressed the bell and waited. A full minute passed and he pressed it again. The fear that had prompted his remarks to Trudie came back to him. He banished them. Unless the hallboy had known that Martha was in, he would have told the visitor that his ride upstairs would be in vain. And as he pressed the bell for the third time the door slowly opened.

Martha stood there, but not the Martha whom he had kissed yesterday. Her creamy skin was ashen now; her violet eyes were black, their color definitely changed by some emotion; even her black hair, that always seemed to have a vivid, alive quality, was dull, hung stringily over her forehead.

"Oh—it's you," she said haltingly.

"Who else, Martha, dear?" he asked. He tried to make his voice light, but felt that he failed miserably.

She stepped aside, then closed the door quickly as he entered the room. He seized her hands.

"Martha, you little silly—" he began.

But she cut him short with a gesture. He followed the direction of her pointing—and trembling—hand. Through the open door of her bedroom he could see her bed. And upon it, pajama-clad, lay the figure of a man. He recognized the features, distorted though they were—of Gerrish. Also he recognized, without word from her, that Gerrish was dead.

Chapter XII

THE little things of life always bothered Cranston. He could spend minutes deciding whether to send a telegram instead of a letter, whether to take a taxi or hop aboard a bus. He would discard four rumpled white ties and then decide that a dinner jacket was more suitable anyway. But great emergencies always found him cool and collected and instinctively doing the right thing. That finicky fussiness, which is so often a part of bachelorhood, never accompanied him into the jungle. When a false step might mean destruction to himself and his followers, he wasted no time in bewailing his fate; he came to decision instantly and having embarked upon a course wasted no time in later doubts as to the correctness of his decision.

A lesser man, face to face with a situation like this, would have allowed his own alarm to increase the obvious terror of the girl. Such a man, in panic himself, would have been incapable of restoring her to calm. But Cranston showed none of the shocked amazement that possessed him.

As a matter of fact, shock and amazement nearly always waited until after the event to visit Cranston. In the moment of emergency his emotions seemed non-existent; only a cool mind seemed to animate his every move.

He dropped the one hand which he still grasped. Two strides took him to the bedroom door and a sweep of one hand closed that door. The very decision of his action did a lot to calm the girl. It was almost as if shutting out the sight of Gerrish also shut him out of Martha's mind.

Nothing less than a sheer genius for emergency could have dictated the action. When hysteria is close to us we are strengthened by another's strength. The mere fact that Cranston did *something* was enough to assure Martha that probably he could do more. Light appeared in her eyes, livening their dullness.

He turned back to her, reached her side as swiftly as he had left it, grasped both of her hands again and led her, not too hurriedly, to a couch. The pressure of his fingers made her sit down. Without relinquishing his grip he kicked a chair into position and sat down opposite her.

"Now don't cry," he said crisply. "Just tell me everything."

Her eyes widened and there was visible a convulsive movement of her throat, as though she fought to swallow and found the muscles too tight. He recognized at once his error: to ask her to tell him everything meant that she would begin with horror and perhaps hysterically end there.

"Never mind. Answer my questions," he ordered. "What time did you get here?"

She seemed to sense the purpose in his change of attack, as though she recognized her nearness to breakdown and knew that he was trying to help her avoid that.

"About ten o'clock," she replied.

He glanced at his wrist-watch. It was eleven thirty-five now. He had left the Lemming house slightly over an hour ago. But as he left the butler had told him that Miss Blaisdell had departed several hours before that. Several hours must mean at least three or four.

"But you left Trudie's a long time ago," he objected.

"I know. But I had to wait for a train, and I felt so dreadfully about last night—and now it's a hundred times as bad!" Her voice rose and Cranston deliberately slapped her on the cheek. For a moment fury burned in the eyes that were no longer black, but violet, and then complete sanity appeared in them.

"I won't break down," she said quietly. "Thanks."

Once, twenty years ago, when Letty pulled his hair, Cranston had taken a mild punch at his sister. But never since had it occurred to him to strike a woman. Had he been asked, ten minutes ago, if there were any conceivable circumstances which would have aroused him to the point of slapping a woman's face, he would not even have bothered to answer so ridiculous a question. And if, ignoring his silence, the questioner had asked him what he thought a woman would do if he slapped her, a million guesses—provided his dignity permitted him to hazard them—would not have brought him to the truth. He had slapped a woman and she had thanked him. Sometime in the future a recollection of this morning would come vividly to him and the most salient point in the recollection would be

Martha's quick recovery of her self-possession and her complete understanding of the reason for his light blow.

"I left Trudie's at about six. There aren't many trains on Sunday morning, I discovered. The next one—one was just pulling out of the station as I arrived there—didn't leave until eight two. I suppose I could have hired a car, but I was too miserable to think about it. I just sat in the station. As a matter of fact, I didn't want to spend the twenty dollars that a car would have cost. I got into town a little after nine. I knew there'd be no one here. I had let my maid and cook off for the week-end. And they'd both told me that they wouldn't be back until to-night. And I was in no mood to cook my own breakfast."

She drew a long breath, and Cranston noticed that she had no difficulty now in breathing or swallowing. Also the ashen quality had left her cheeks and a hint of red showed through the creamy skin.

"I went into the railroad restaurant and ordered something to eat. I went through several of the papers, thinking there might be something in them about—" she flushed painfully—"last night. I took a long time over breakfast. Somehow, it seemed to me that I never wanted to see my apartment, to see anyone I knew, ever again." Her eyes narrowed; they glanced toward the bedroom door. "We must do something," she said.

He shook his head.

"I want to know everything first," he told her.

"Well, I finally decided to go to my apartment. What I'd do after that I hadn't decided. I came up here, unlocked the door and found Gerry here."

Once again her voice became faintly shrill and he leaned toward her.

"Never mind. There's nothing to be afraid of. Go ahead."

"He was in pajamas. He was out of his mind. I saw that instantly and started out. But he got between me and the door and said that if I left he'd make such a noise that the employes would come in. He said he'd give me more scandal than I could imagine. He'd been drinking, and I could tell that he wanted an excuse to bring people to the apartment. He raved. He talked about you and threatened all sorts of things. And he said that that summons last night was just the beginning. He said that those men had reported to him what Peter Baxter had said and he told me that he was going to sue Baxter. Then he stopped threatening and pleaded. He said that I was ruined unless I married him. He said he wouldn't leave my apartment, that he'd call in newspaper men, let them find him here in pajamas. And he asked me how I would explain that. I tell you, he wasn't merely drunk, he was mad. And I was frightened."

She snatched her hands from Cranston's grasp and covered her eyes with them.

"How did he get in here?" asked Cranston.

She dropped her hands and looked at him.

"He asked how I would explain that. He told me that when he had rented this apartment for me he had had a key made for himself. But he asked me who would believe such a statement if it came from me. I tried to calm him, and he simply laughed at me. He said that he'd not leave until he had my word that I'd marry him as soon as he got his divorce. He said that he wouldn't trust my word, and that he'd make me sign a paper admitting that I had borrowed money from him and that he'd given it to me on my promise to marry him. And then when I told him to telephone downstairs and ask the hallman to come up, when I told him to telephone the newspapers, he went completely, utterly, raving mad. For a moment I thought he'd kill me. He ran toward me and I was frightened to move. But he stopped, turned, went into the bedroom and fell upon the bed. He was so silent that I went in there, and I saw he was dead."

Again her hands hid her face and Cranston asked a quick question.

"How long ago was that?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. Maybe half an hour ago."

"Have you been sitting here all that time?" he asked.

"I couldn't make up my mind what to do. How could I explain his being here, undressed? After all he said, after he brought a suit against me? I've been half insane. My God, who will believe what I've just been telling you?"

"I believe it," said Cranston quietly.

She flashed him a look of gratitude.

"You would. But who else would believe that he'd do such a thing, that he'd come to my apartment this way unless—unless he'd been in the habit of coming here? There isn't a thing to do except telephone the police. I've known that ever since he staggered into the bedroom and fell upon the bed. But I've put it off, hoping, praying that I could see some way out of it. But I can't. There isn't any way out of it."

Between his eyes appeared furrows. Desperately he tried to think of some response to her statement. She had phrased her hopelessness flatly, yet he knew that she put it as a question. She was relying upon him, in a moment when there could be no reliance upon anyone.

"You stay here," he ordered.

He walked to the bedroom door and opened it. The distortion of Gerrish's features had told him at his first glance that the man was dead, and a quick examination now merely verified what he already knew. Cranston had seen death many times. Men died from fever, from hardship, from sudden accident, in those explorations of his. But he had never seen death in so unpleasant a face as now. The man reeked of liquor, and his face looked as though not merely pain but terror had overwhelmed him in the moment in which he was struck down.

He turned away from Gerrish and looked about the room. There were the clothes which he had taken off and drunkenly thrown upon the floor. There was a small

handbag, initialed G. G., in which he had brought his night things.

Cranston bit his lower lip. Amateur though he was in such matters, he knew that Gerrish's death had been due to an apoplectic stroke which had not been mitigated by his drunken condition. No blame—for his death—could attach itself to Martha. But there was no place in the civilized world where the name of Martha Blaisdell would not cause a lifting of eyebrows and the clatter of tongues. If she had been gossiped about heretofore because of her supposed relations with Gerrish, what would be said about her now when the man's body, clad for the night, was discovered in her bedroom.

Those friends of Martha who knew what a lying scoundrel Gerrish had been would accept her explanation. But the rest of the world would not believe her bizarre tale. Why should it? It is always so much easier to believe the obvious than to strain one's credulity in believing the bizarre. Also, the world liked to believe scandal. And the higher placed the subject of scandal was, the more readily the world believed whispers and insinuations. No woman on earth could live down the implications of this affair.

Not merely because he loved her, but because she was a woman in unjust distress, Cranston racked his brains to discover some way out of the situation. To his credit be it said that the fact that he hoped to make her his wife, and that such a scandal about his wife would make life

almost unendurable for him, in no way entered his thoughts now. Not dread for himself, but terror for her stimulated his mind.

He thought, of course, of telephoning for a doctor. That was the natural thing to do; indeed, pertinent questions would be asked as to why Martha had not done this instantly.

But the doctor would have to file such report as physicians must always file in the event of death. By this afternoon, at latest, newspaper men would be questioning Martha. In despair he went back into the livingroom.

Martha was seated where he had left her. Only yesterday she had been more alive than any girl he knew. There had been about her a magnetism that was not solely her appeal to him but was something that made her akin to the birds, to trees, the moving waters of the Sound. She was life itself, youthful life. But now the faint color that had come back to her cheeks had retreated again. Haggard and frightened she looked almost old.

"What can we do?" she asked.

He took his place again in the chair before her.

"If we wait too long—" she shuddered. "Can't a doctor tell how long he's been—dead? Won't a doctor think it's funny that we didn't send for him sooner?"

The way she said "we" thrilled Cranston. A few hours ago she had fled from Trudie Lemming's house determined, obviously, not to see Cranston again. But now she leaned upon him, counted upon him to help her in this appalling situation.

"I suppose he would," he admitted, "unless we got a doctor that would be willing——"

"Pete!" she cried.

Cranston put away an unworthy feeling of annoyance. In need like this why should he care that Martha's tongue uttered, almost spontaneously, the name of another man? He wondered at, and was ashamed of, the quick jealousy that came to him.

"Of course," he said. He picked up the telephone and called Trudie Lemming's house at Green Point. Because caution gripped him he did not give his own name, but said that Mr. Wilson wished to speak to Dr. Baxter on a matter of great importance.

"Dr. Baxter isn't here," Trudie's butler told him. "He left for New York about half an hour ago. He'll be back for luncheon though."

Cranston hung up, thumbed the pages of the telephone book and found the number of St. John's Clinic. In a moment he was speaking to the nurse that answered the telephone.

"Is Dr. Baxter there?"

"He's not in now," was the reply.

"Do you expect him?"

"Is this a patient?" asked the nurse. "The doctor doesn't like to see patients on Sunday morning. If it's very important——"

"It's life and death," Cranston assured her.

"Well," the nurse was reluctant, "in that case—The

doctor is coming in shortly to see a case, a patient who can only see him on Sundays. I'll have him telephone if you'll give the number."

He gave her Martha's number.

"You'll tell him it's imperative, won't you?" he insisted.

"He should phone you in less than fifteen minutes," the nurse assured him.

He hung up and turned to Martha. Her eyes met his, and his heart ached to put his arms around her, to console her in her extremity as lovers have consoled maidens through the ages. But her upper lip was stiff, and he feared that any tenderness, however well meant, might rob her of the courage which she so sorely needed now.

"But what good will it do?" she asked hopelessly. "Even if Peter reports that Gerry died after he got here——"

"You've caught onto the idea," he interrupted her. "We've gained that much time. We don't have to explain why we didn't call a doctor two hours earlier. And maybe while we're waiting for Pete to come we can think of something. And even if we can't, Peter will be sure to."

"But what?" she almost wailed. "What on earth can anyone think of? What is there that anyone can possibly do?"

Once again he took her hand firmly in his own.

"You're not to ask that question. You're not to ask any questions. You're just to be brave," he ordered.

Chapter XIII

A NEWSPAPER man had once told Cranston of the horror of awaiting an execution. He said that the fifteen minutes before the criminal was led to the death chamber seemed, paradoxically, to last fifteen years and also to have terminated in fifteen seconds. And the spectators, he said, were more nervous than the condemned man. Fright had stupefied him.

Cranston felt the same sensation now. Later on, he realized that Baxter had telephoned in less than twenty minutes, but while he waited they seemed as many years. Yet, extraordinarily, he could almost *see* the minutes racing by. He could never explain this oddity, any more than the newspaper reporter could explain the swift and slow passage of time before the execution.

Martha said nothing during the wait. Cranston, watching her closely, yet trying to be casual about it, uttered no word. He was afraid that further conversation would rob her of the self-control for which she fought so bravely. They might have been, he mused bitterly, two grief-stricken mourners watching over the dead, instead of being two people who hated the man in the next room. For it was hate that Cranston felt. Death is supposed to remove from generous hearts all bitterness toward the one who has

passed away, but Gerrish's evil was Shakespearean in that it certainly lived after him.

He did not realize how nervous he was until the telephone rang. But he stumbled as he crossed the room to the instrument and for a moment he could not phrase the simple syllables, "hello."

"Dr. Baxter speaking."

"This is Cranston. I'm at Martha Blaisdell's apartment. Don't tell even your nurse that you're talking to me. Get over here just as soon as you possibly can."

"I'll be there instantly," said Baxter.

Cranston looked at the girl; she was in an apathy now; although she knew to whom Cranston had been speaking there was not the faintest sign of interest on her features. Once again he sat down before her.

"Peter will be here in a minute," he said.

She looked at him through eyes over which a glaze seemed to have been spread, and her shoulders shrugged faintly. She was very like, Cranston thought, that criminal whom the reporter had described to him. For dread can bring on a dullness of emotion that resembles indifference.

He lighted a cigarette and had smoked it almost to the end when the apartment bell rang. He crushed out the cigarette and admitted Baxter.

"Didn't announce myself; came right up. Martha ill?"

There was something about the crispness of his speech that gave Cranston confidence; even into Martha's eyes came a glimmer of hope.

"She's all right," said Cranston quickly. "But Gerrish is in the next room—dead."

Baxter's eyebrows, as red as his hair, lifted. But without a word to Martha he walked to the bedroom, opened the door, and entered. Cranston followed him and noted the swift competence of the examination. He saw Baxter examine the dead man's eyes. Then he straightened up.

"Cerebral hemorrhage, I should say," he announced. He sniffed the air. "Been drinking heavily, which didn't help. Now let me hear about it."

Cranston led him into the livingroom, and Martha looked up.

"Now, Martha," said Cranston, "Pete is here. Just tell him everything and don't be frightened."

More briefly than she had recounted the tale to Cranston, she repeated it now to Baxter, who listened in utter silence. As she finished Cranston took up the story.

"You can see, Pete, that it's impossible that Gerrish should be found here."

Baxter nodded.

"But it's equally impossible that he should be found anywhere else," he said. "Unless—if no one knew he were here?" He looked questioningly at Martha.

She shook her head slowly.

"Unless he told someone he was coming here, I don't think anyone knows. You see, he boasted that every one would think he spent the night here, although he only came in about six o'clock, he told me. He said that he guessed

that after last night at the Hyslops' I wouldn't want to stay at Trudie's. Oh, he was shrewd, cunning. He said that he slipped up the stairs and that the hallman and the elevator boy hadn't seen him. He told me that they couldn't testify that he came in this morning.

"But he knew you could prove you weren't here last night," said Baxter.

"He didn't care what I could prove. All he cared about was making things look dreadful. Scandal doesn't have to be proved; it only has to be mentioned."

Baxter hardly heard her. His forehead was furrowed now, and Cranston, who had concentrated until his brain was dizzy, wondered if the doctor could see any way out of the difficulty. The problem had baffled Cranston and he prayed now that it would not be as unsolvable to Baxter.

"If we could get him out of here—if we could get him to my office—" Baxter's voice died away, although his lips kept on moving. His voice became audible again. "He could have come to me as a patient."

"After what you said to those subpoena servers last night?" objected Cranston.

"No, not as a patient," Baxter corrected himself. "But as a drunken man, enraged—that would be plausible enough."

"But wouldn't it be known that he died a long time before?"

Baxter waved aside this objection of Cranston's.

"It's getting him there—in broad daylight. There's no

one at the clinic. I saw my patient and the nurse has gone. Not a soul there. If we could get him there—the time of his death wouldn't matter. There'd be nothing suspicious about it. And it would be better to say that the man regretted last night and that he'd come to me to apologize."

"And involve you in a scandal that might ruin you!" cried Martha.

"Now that is too silly to debate," said Baxter. "There's no scandal in a man dying in a doctor's office. And for that matter I'd stick to my first story. A drunken man does all sorts of unreasonable things. He was close to delirium tremens and came to me because my name was in his mind. He just came, that's all. Let it go at that. And died there before I could treat him. Let's reach the bridge that leads to my office before we try crossing later bridges. How can we get him there?"

"We can dress him and carry him downstairs to your car," said Cranston.

Baxter's head shook impatiently.

"With an elevator man and a hallboy downstairs? Impossible. It will be in the papers—it has to get in the papers. They'd read about it; they'd remember that I helped carry a man out of here. If it weren't for that, we could pretend he was drunk——"

Into his voice, into his eyes, came the same hopelessness that had been in the voices and eyes of Martha and Cranston.

A great sob came chokingly from Martha's throat.

"You're sweet, both of you, but nothing can be done. You'd better phone the police, Pete."

"Wait a bit," said Cranston. He stared at Martha. "Do the stairs go around the elevator?"

She looked at him uncomprehendingly, but shook her head.

"No, they're separate from the elevator."

Cranston turned to the doctor.

"Listen," he whispered excitedly. "We'll dress him and take him down one flight of stairs. Then Martha can drop a lighted match in a waste basket. Stuff it full of newspapers. Wait until it's blazing and then telephone downstairs. Tell the hallman to come right up. Tell him to bring the elevator man with him. Tell him not to telephone the fire department because the two of them can put it out easily. We'll go down to the last landing; one of us can see if the coast is clear; if it is we'll carry Gerrish to your car."

"But people on the street may see you do it," objected Martha.

"What of it? He'll be just a drunken man, or a sick man, to them. They'll never connect this incident with what they may happen to read in tomorrow's papers."

"But someone may see you carrying him into the clinic," protested Martha.

Cranston frowned impatiently.

"If it were as simple as A B C, Martha, if there were no risks at all we wouldn't have to do any figuring. Of

course there are a thousand chances of discovery, but there's one of success. And I'll take that chance if Pete will."

"Of course," assented Baxter.

"But discovery would mean ruin for you both," cried Martha. "There must be a law against doing a thing like that. And breaking the law would ruin you as a doctor, Pete. And you might even go to jail, Bert. Why should I let you men take risks like that?"

Cranston smiled at her.

"If a man loves a girl he has a right to take risks for her," he said.

She looked at Baxter and the freckles on his face were obscured by the crimson tide that flooded over them.

"I can't let you do it, Pete. Or you, Bert. Why, you two men can dress him now and you can pretend that he—died—sitting here in the livingroom."

Baxter shook his head.

"I don't like it," he said. "In the first place it's going to come out that he brought suit against you. There will be speculation as to what he was doing here, as to how Bert and I happened to be here. It will look as though we were holding some sort of a conference, trying to come to some agreement with him. If there had been no trouble between you and him——"

"And between Bert and him," interjected Martha. "And last night you denounced those two men. But just the same," she added hastily, "you can't take the risks."

"I suppose, having thought the matter over carefully, the thing for Bert and myself to do is to walk out of here," said Baxter dryly. "But we're not going; we're going to see you through this. If some friend had happened to die in your apartment it would be entirely different. But you can be sure that Gerrish's office staff know all about his actions. Gerrish was prominent in a left-handed sort of way. The gossip columns mention him occasionally. You can be sure that some of the newspapers know today about the summons served last night. One thing piles on top of another in a case like this. Don't you agree with me, Bert?"

"He can't be found here," said Cranston flatly. "I won't permit it. Martha has endured enough from that swine living; she's got to be spared from him dead. But the more we discuss it the less I like to drag you into it, Pete. I'm engaged to Martha; I love her. But there's no reason why you——"

Again Baxter's face flamed.

"I've just as much reason to want to help her as you have, Cranston," he said.

Cranston stared at him; he looked at Martha. Probably never in the world had an accepted lover been informed of another man's love for the same girl under such bizarre circumstances. For a moment he meditated utterly refusing Baxter's aid. It wasn't fair that Baxter, who had nothing to hope for from Martha should take the chance of blackening his career. Then he realized that he himself,

had he no hope of winning Martha, would nevertheless esteem it a privilege to serve her. Why should he deny Baxter a similar privilege?

"Let's go in and dress him," he said.

Martha watched them as they closed the bedroom door behind them. Could she accept from these two men the possible sacrifice that their aid involved? After all, she had been wilfully blind; she should never have accepted Gerrish's easy assurance that all was well with her financially. She had laid herself open to censure. True, her carelessness had never deserved such punishment, but what right had she to evade even an undeserved punishment if evasion compromised others?

She thought for a moment of going to the telephone and calling the police. But the impulse died in her. After all, Bert and Pete might be able to save her. If they were discovered she would then confess everything and certainly the two men could not be punished by the law for doing a chivalrous thing. Nevertheless, her conscience told her that she was accepting too much from them. She had accepted too much from Gerrish, and that had led to all these later dreadful happenings. If she loved Cranston truly, it would be different. A woman had a right to accept sacrifices from the man who loved her if she also loved him. But did she have such right when her love was only a pretense, only a way of escape?

Then, as she thought of the screaming newspaper headlines, of the cynical amusement in the eyes of strangers

and the contempt in the eyes of acquaintances and the pity in the eyes of friends, she hardened herself.

The two men appeared in the doorway. Between them, his head dangling from his shoulders, his hat crushed down on his forehead, they supported the figure of Gerrish. Her fingers touched her mouth as though to hold back a scream of horror.

"You be brave, Martha," said Cranston sternly. "Paper in the basket? Touch a match to it; wait till it blazes; phone downstairs and tell *both* men to come up. Insist they come instantly. Let a few things burn; it doesn't matter. I'll be back in twenty minutes."

An afterthought came to her.

"But the hallman—the elevator man—they must have seen you come here. They'll wonder that you aren't here now."

"Let them wonder!" said Cranston. "If they ask any questions just tell them that we left together and must have walked downstairs. But they won't think of that. At least, we've got to take the chance. Don't argue any more. Just be brave and do what I told you."

She averted her eyes as they dragged the loose figure across the floor. It reminded her vaguely of a scarecrow that she had once seen flapping in the wind. And yet, so firmly did the two men hold him, Gerrish might have passed, to the casual observer, for a man overcome by liquor. But if anyone looked closely. . . .

She heard the door close behind them; it would take

them two minutes to descend to the street, she guessed. So she waited half a minute, then struck a match and applied it to the newspapers in the waste basket. Then she walked to the telephone, not her own private phone but the one connected with the desk downstairs.

"There's a fire in my room," she said to the hallman. "You and the elevator man can easily put it out, so don't ring the fire department, but bring the elevator man right up with you, please."

The hallman didn't even answer, but the bang of the receiver told her that he would not delay. She ran to the middle of the floor and kicked over the blazing basket. She thrust one of the flaming papers beneath an overstuffed chair, and the valance caught fire immediately. It was blazing fiercely as she opened the door to admit the two employees.

In a minute the blaze was extinguished.

"How'd it happen, Miss Blaisdell," asked the panting elevator man.

"I was careless," she replied. "I lighted a cigarette and tossed the match into the basket. Which was a very foolish thing to do, but I thought the match was out."

The hallboy grinned.

"I'm going to burn my joint down some night," he said. "I fell asleep with a cigarette in my mouth last week, but it burned my hand and woke me up. Nothing else we can do? You ain't scared, are you?"

She shook her head and pressed into his hand a sizeable

bill; she gave its mate to the other amateur fireman. Beaming, assuring her that it had been no trouble at all and a real pleasure, they departed. She sank upon the couch and stared at the damaged chair.

Bert and Pete should be almost at the clinic by now. She glanced out the window and her heart leaped as she saw that a sudden thunder storm had arisen. That would drive people off the streets. The pleasant park by the clinic would be deserted. No one—with luck—would see Pete and Bert carry their burden into the doctor's office. Of course, people might be watching from windows, but she musn't think of that. Fate had not been very kind to her recently; perhaps fate would make amends this morning for its recent cruelties.

She looked at the clock on a table. They had been gone ten minutes now. Perhaps they'd telephone her if and when all was well. But probably they wouldn't. Even the most guarded utterance might later on arouse a reminiscent suspicion in the mind of an operator who might have handled the call and overheard a sentence.

She felt a sudden faintness, reaction from near-hysteria, and walked to the bathroom to get a glass of water. Her head was splitting; she'd take an aspirin first.

Gerrish's pajamas lay on the bed. There, too, was his handbag. She stuffed the pajamas into the bag and put it in the closet. That was something she didn't want the maid to discover. Sometime after dark she'd get rid of it. Or perhaps, if all went well, so far, Bert would take it away and dispose of it.

How good Bert had been to her! Now, she could never tell him that she didn't love him. After all he had done today, that would be a cruelty too great. And she would never let him guess that she didn't care.

And how good Pete had been! He had no false pride; frankly, when Cranston had balked at letting Pete help, the doctor had admitted that he too cared for her. She didn't deserve the love of two such men. No girl could be worthy of such love. And it was a love not based on long acquaintance, on knowledge of any merit she might have. They just loved her. And her eyes flooded with tears of gratitude and weakness.

The clang of a telephone brought her from her reverie. It was Cranston or Pete, she was sure, to tell her that all was well, or . . . She refused to face the alternative.

"Hello," she said into the mouthpiece.

"Mr. Gerrish's man speaking," said a strange voice. "May I speak to Mr. Gerrish?"

She felt an actual pain in the pit of her stomach; her heart skipped a beat. Then, trying to make her voice steady, she answered.

"Mr. Gerrish isn't here," she said.

"When did he leave?" asked the man.

"He hasn't been here," she replied.

"Very well, ma'am," said the man.

But as she hung up she knew that it wasn't very well; it wasn't well at all. Gerrish's man knew, or at least suspected, that his master had been here. That complicated matters. Terror came racing back to her.

Chapter XIV

AND now," said Peter Baxter, "you hustle out of here."

Cranston stared at the doctor. He felt that reluctance which a man of courage feels at letting another shoulder all of the burden that rightfully should be shared. More than that! By rights Cranston should carry all of the load. He was the man whom Martha Blaisdell loved and the gift of her love entailed obligations that ought not be paid by another.

He ran a finger inside his soft collar. Had the collar been laundered stiff it would have been limp now. And not merely the mugginess of the morning nor the exertion of his recent task had brought the moisture to his throat; sheer stark terror, the kind of panicky fright that once or twice had attacked him in the loneliness of the jungle, had opened now the pores of his skin.

He was and always had been a law-abiding man. There had been times, in his absences from civilization, when he had been compelled to make and enforce his own laws, but there had always been, on those occasions, the soul-supporting knowledge that unless he became the law-giver and law-enforcer destruction would overwhelm his expedition. But, save in those exigencies when he must rely upon his own sense of what was right, he respected the law.

Now he feared it. It was all very well to assure himself that he and Baxter were doing nothing wrong, were in fact doing something decent. But death is awe-inspiring always, and when death is accompanied by secrecies and evasions it becomes terrifying.

There was no question but that the law objected to furtive transference of a body. The law provided ways and means for such transference, and there must be heavy penalties for the act that he and Baxter had just now committed. Not only must there exist those penalties, but the very fact that he and Baxter had risked them would in itself arouse suspicion. All the circumstances—and these must inevitably come to light—would add to the suspicion. He, Cranston, had quarreled with and threatened Gerrish; only last night Baxter had defied Gerrish's process servers. That Gerrish's death had not been due solely to natural causes might even occur to the police.

He had been calm enough as he and Baxter carried the limp body down the stairs of Martha's apartment house. As they passed through the fortunately deserted lobby to the sidewalk, Cranston's grip of Gerrish's waist had been firm. There had been no trembling of his hands as he assisted Baxter in placing Gerrish in the coupe. He had even been careful enough to pull Gerrish's hat down over his face as the car started off. There had been people across the street, but they had been occupied with their own conversation, with their own concerns. Cranston doubted if any of them had even noticed the apparently drunken

man who was assisted into the little car. As a traffic block held them up at Broadway, Cranston had been quick-witted enough to pretend a conversation with the inanimate figure so tightly wedged between himself and Baxter. And his mind had been clear enough, as they neared St. John's Square, to appreciate the happy chance of the sudden thunder storm that sent pedestrians scurrying for shelter. He had been cool enough to appreciate why Peter Baxter drove completely around the square before stopping in front of his Clinic. He realized that Baxter was making certain that there would be no observers. And there had been no failing of Cranston's nerves as he and the doctor carried Gerrish into the Clinic.

But now, with Gerrish sprawled upon a couch, Cranston's overtaut nerves asserted themselves.

"I can't leave you alone here with him," he protested. "My God, suppose some one saw us carry him in here! You've got to have some one to back up your story."

"I can't have anyone to back it up," said Baxter. "If anyone can corroborate it then my story isn't true. And there's a paradox for you," he laughed.

If he hadn't laughed Cranston would have given way to his nerves. Vaguely he realized that even as he had slapped Martha's face to stop hysteria, so Peter Baxter was exaggerating his own coolness to calm Cranston. His face, that had been deadly white, flushed now.

"I know you're right, but it seems so damn yellow to leave you here—suppose somebody saw us carry him in here?"

"We've been all over that," said Baxter. "I don't think anyone did. And as a matter of fact, who's going to connect one thing with another? You'd better let me prescribe a stiff drink for you."

Cranston shook his head.

"Well, if you won't, then you'd better get out of here," said Baxter.

"But isn't there anything I can do?" demanded Cranston.

"Not a thing in the world," replied the other.

Still Cranston hesitated.

"I think you're one swell person, Pete," he said.

"You're all right yourself," grinned Baxter. "Now get out of here," he went on brusquely. "Remember you've never been here."

"I'll never forget it," said Cranston. "I don't know what Martha and I would have done without you. We owe you more——"

"You owe me nothing," interrupted Baxter. "Does a man think of payment when he's able to serve a girl—will you get out?"

Cranston wheeled; the interchange of speech had completely restored his coolness. He was even thoughtful enough to pull his light felt hat brim down over his eyes. He turned up his coat collar and hunched his shoulders as he stepped into the driving rain. The downpour made it seem natural that he should hide his face, and never had he been more grateful for a thunder storm.

At Third Avenue he picked up a taxi and alighted be-

fore a drug store on Eighth Street. From the clerk at the prescription counter he procured an aspirin tablet which—though not needing it—he swallowed. But if questions were asked he would not only have an answer but corroboration of that answer. Then, collar still up and brim still down, he ran through the rain to Martha's apartment.

The elevator man eyed him in surprise.

"Say, weren't you calling on Miss Blaisdell a while ago?"

Cranston nodded.

"Frightful headache; went to the drug store for an aspirin; raining so hard I didn't come back sooner."

"You missed some excitement that almost made me need an aspirin," grinned the man. "Miss Blaisdell tossed a match in a waste basket and started a sweet little blaze. No real damage though. You must have walked down," he added idly.

"I *ran* down," said Cranston. "One of those headaches that drive you almost crazy for a minute or two."

"Don't I know?" exclaimed the elevator operator. "Me, I think I'll stick to beer. That bath tub gin about splits my knob open. Well, hope you're okay now."

He threw open the elevator door and Cranston pressed the bell of Martha's apartment. As the man descended Martha opened the door.

He took her hands swiftly in his own.

"Everything's all right. Not a thing on earth to worry about. Pete will take care of everything from now on."

He released one hand while he shut the door, then led her to the couch.

"You're not to think of anything that's happened, Martha," he told her.

She smiled wanly; he felt the faintest pressure of her fingers.

"You're sweet, Bert," she said, "but Gerry's man phoned."

He dropped her hand.

"What do you mean?" he asked harshly.

"He telephoned—soon after you went out. He said he was Mr. Gerrish's man and asked if he could speak to Gerry. I told him he wasn't here, and he asked when he left, and I replied that he hadn't been here."

"What did he say then?" demanded Cranston.

"I don't know. 'Very well' or something like that."

"Well, there's nothing to be frightened about."

She sighed hopelessly.

"But don't you see, Bert? He must have told his man that he was coming here! When he's found dead——"

He heard the rising note in her voice that had been there earlier.

"He won't be *found dead*," he said. "In the office of the doctor to whom he went for treatment, he died. His death will be reported through the usual channels. There's nothing extraordinary about it. That he told his man he could be found at your apartment means nothing."

"Unless someone knows he came here," she said. Her voice was definitely shrill again.

"Martha, you mustn't give way to fear. I'll slap your face," he threatened.

The unexpectedness of his words, and the threatening gesture with which he accompanied them, were enough to restore her to a quasi-coolness.

"I won't break down, Bert," she promised, "but I'm frightened."

"Of course you are. Who wouldn't be? I'm scared myself. But that doesn't mean that we have anything really of which to be afraid. Why not wait until something happens? The chances are in our favor that nothing will happen."

But her mind, terror inspired, was too active, refused to be placid at his suggestion.

"I know—Pete's a doctor, but still—he can't simply say that a man died in his office and get away with it."

"He seems to think he can and he ought to know," Cranston assured her. "Martha, talk doesn't get us anywhere. Thinking gets us nowhere. You'll only get yourself in a terrible state if you worry any longer. I tell you again there's nothing unusual in what happened. You've got to be brave, Martha. You've got to act as though nothing in the world has gone wrong. And nothing will go wrong. The apartment employees suspect nothing. I told one of them, when I came in just now, that I'd gone out to the drug store. I even went to a drug store and even took an aspirin, just in case I had to prove it later. I didn't take my car because I thought I'd find a drug

store around the corner. I was gone some time because I stepped in a doorway to avoid the sudden rain. I didn't take the elevator downstairs because my headache was so frightful that I couldn't even wait the few seconds the elevator might take to get upstairs. Does all that sound logical and convincing?"

She nodded dumbly.

"Now just suppose you're questioned. I can't see why you will be, but just suppose. You and I quarreled last night. We'd just become engaged but we quarreled. It was a trivial quarrel. Now let's think of something trivial. I wanted to visit Orken in Denmark on our honeymoon. You wanted to go to Honolulu. We fought over that."

"But that's too ridiculous," she protested.

"All lovers' quarrels are ridiculous," he smiled. "The more absurd the occasion for the quarrel the more convincing it seems. So, in a tee-wee, you got up early in the morning and came in to New York."

"But I left a note for Trudie, telling her the real reason," she objected.

"Trudie isn't going to tell anyone what was in that note," he assured her. "She'll say what we tell her to say, like the good sport she is. You wrote her that we'd had a quarrel and that I was obstinate and pig-headed and you didn't want to see me again. I think Trudie will tell a white lie for us."

"But what's the object?"

"The object is to minimize as much as possible the fact

that Gerrish ever lived. That's all," he said. "Just to make it certain—if suspicion should be aroused—that you couldn't have had a rendezvous with Gerrish. Oh, I know that your friends wouldn't think such a thing, but if this valet talks—But that's absurd. Gerrish knew that you were in Long Island last night, knew it well enough to send those process-servers out there, so it's obvious he didn't expect to find you in your apartment last night."

He passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"I'm so mixed up that I'm not thinking clearly. What I'm driving at is that we don't want it to seem that Gerrish's suit affected you, in your relations with me, in the slightest. And the best thing to do is to go back to Trudie's now."

"Why?" she asked.

"Suppose reporters find out about Gerrish's suit? His sudden death will make them want to interview you. God knows why their minds would act that way, but they would. But if you're out of town the whole thing will blow over in a day or so. Cold news is no news. Besides, you can't stay here; you'll brood and worry. Your bag is still packed, isn't it?"

"Then we'll just take it down to my car and go out to Green Point."

"Then, if the newspapers do want to question me, they'll send reporters out to Trudie's and drag her name into the affair," she objected.

"And what makes you think that Trudie would mind

that?" he countered. "Good lord, Martha, what do you think friends are for? If you hadn't been a stupid little girl, you'd never have left Green Point."

"And then my maid or cook would have found him here," she shuddered.

"Of course," he admitted. "I told you I wasn't thinking clearly. But who could? Gerrish was so bizarre that his actions set one's mind off at a crazy angle. But forget him. Are you ready?"

She looked up at him and something of the gaiety that had entranced him when first he met her shone in her violet eyes.

"As soon as I've fixed my lips and powdered my nose I will be," she replied.

She opened a tiny compact and scrutinized herself carefully in the mirror. She applied lipstick to her mouth and dabbed her nose with a miniature puff. Cranston, even, in this tense moment, found himself smiling.

Women are marvelous. No matter what the situation they could think of appearance. Still consciousness of looking one's best frequently enabled one to do one's best. And a person who could spend thought on her appearance was not in imminent danger of breaking down.

As she looked up at him he quelled an impulse to transfer some of that freshly applied lipstick to his own mouth. Tenderness was not in order at the moment; matter-of-factness was. So long as he could keep her mind fixed on the things that must be done she would be safe from reac-

tion. Not for some time must there be any gentle interlude.

He noticed, with approval, that without any artificial aid the stringy quality had gone from her hair; there was life to her movements as she rose from the couch. All in all, she was a thoroughbred.

They had reached the apartment door when she paused.

"He brought a handbag; I stuffed his pajamas in it. It's in my closet. I was afraid my maid would find it. We must get rid of it."

He looked at her with approval. His own mind had not been functioning too clearly, yet hers had not overlooked a detail that might prove important. Perhaps, he told himself, she had not been as close to breakdown as he thought. She had the kind of courage that enabled her to think coolly under stress. What a damn swine Gerrish had been to create stress for such a girl.

He went into the bedroom and from the closet floor picked up a handbag.

"This it?"

She nodded.

"Nothing else here? Hair brush, razor—anything at all?"

She shook her head.

"But shouldn't we phone Pete?" she unexpectedly asked.

"Why? That's the very thing we shouldn't do. We don't know where Pete is. If anything, we think he is at Trudie's. Why should we phone him?"

"I know," she said, "but—we're leaving him to carry it all, aren't we?"

He felt a momentary—and he realized unworthy—twinge of jealousy. All through the past hour or more he had fought against jealousy. It seemed to him that having to call in aid at a time like this reflected somehow on his own capacity to protect the girl he loved. He realized that he would not have felt this way had it not suddenly become known to him that Baxter, extraordinarily, was in love with Martha. Had Baxter been merely a mutual friend he would have had none of this feeling, and he knew it. It was cheap and ignoble to resent the fact that a man who loved Martha should be willing and able to do her service, and he tried to thrust the feeling from him.

"But he's the only one who can carry it, dear," he told her. "And now that he has picked up the load we'd knock it out of his hands if we interfered in any way. You see that, don't you?"

"I suppose so," she admitted. Her voice was dull again. "But it seems cowardly, doesn't it?"

"It seems sane," he replied.

"Oh," she cried with quick contrition, "I didn't mean that you were cowardly. I meant that I——"

"You've been the bravest girl in the world," he interrupted her. "You just continue to be brave."

"I will," she promised.

Chapter XV

PETER BAXTER surveyed the body sprawled on the couch. Death was no novelty to him and he observed it with none of the horror of the layman. But this was an unusual death; this was a death in which he had evaded if not broken the law; it was death which might very well produce serious consequences for himself. Yet thought of these consequences was hardly in his mind as he surveyed the form of Gerrish. He was thinking of Martha Blaisdell, of the possible blighting scandal that would strike her if he made one false move. It must never be known—he must guard his tongue lest the faintest slip arouse suspicion—that Gerrish had been dead when he came into the Clinic. The bringing in of a dead man, even by people other than the attendant physician, required notification of the coroner. But if a man came into a doctor's office, even though a stranger and died there, there was no absolute necessity to notify the coroner.

So, then, Gerrish had come in here alive. He had asked for treatment to conquer incipient delirium tremens. As Baxter took his pulse the man dropped dead. Baxter had lifted him to a couch, started to administer restoratives and realized the man had died, unquestionably of cerebral hemorrhage. Gerrish had mentioned his name. Was there anything else that should be committed to memory?

He pondered a moment, then shook his head, and picked up the telephone directory. He thumbed its pages until he found Gerrish's residential telephone number. He called that number.

"This is Dr. Peter Baxter, of St. John's Clinic, St. John's Square, speaking. May I talk to Mrs. Gerrish?"

"Mrs. Gerrish is in Europe," said a voice.

"Then may I speak to any relative?" said Baxter.

"This is Ansted, Mr. Gerrish's valet," said the voice. There was faint apprehension in its tone. "Mr. Gerrish has no relatives here, sir. Is there anything I can do?"

Very deliberately Baxter chose his words.

"Mr. Gerrish came in here a few minutes ago and asked for treatment. He was suffering from acute alcoholism, verging on delirium tremens. Before I could administer any treatment whatsoever he died. I immediately, as soon as I recognized that he was beyond all possible medical aid—which was instantly—telephoned his home. If you are the only person able to act——"

The valet's voice cut in on Baxter's measured utterance.

"Good God, doctor, you mean that Mr. Gerrish is dead?"

"I'm sorry to break the news so harshly, but it had to be done," replied Peter. "Matters like this allow of no delay, forbid evasion. Don't you think you'd better come down here right away? Do you wish me to send for an undertaker or would you prefer to select one yourself?"

The valet gasped.

"M-Must I decide that right away?" he asked.

"It can wait until you get down here, but no longer than that. It's barely possible that other patients might come in——"

Peter hated himself for his own apparent callousness, but his attitude was required by the situation.

"Of course, doctor," agreed the valet. "But—I'd like to see my master's face again, and send for any undertaker, but let him stay where he is until I can see him."

"Of course," said Peter. "You'll be right down?"

"Immediately," said Ansted.

Baxter lighted a cigarette; he sat deliberately down at his desk and began looking over some business papers. He was still engaged with them when Gerrish's valet rang the Clinic bell. Baxter pressed a buzzer which released the catch on the door and a second later the valet was staring, with horrified eyes, at the body of his master.

He turned at length to the doctor.

"When did he die?"

This was a question that Baxter would have feared had it come from a medical man, who might have known that Gerrish had not been alive a quarter of an hour ago. But coming from one not of the medical profession, he didn't fear it.

"Just before I telephoned you," he said.

For a moment Ansted covered his face with his hands. Then, moving shakily, he walked a few feet and sat down in a chair.

"Have you phoned for an undertaker?" he asked.

"Not yet. Shall I do so now?"

The valet nodded. Baxter picked up the telephone, asked for a number and spoke briefly. He hung up and looked questioningly at Ansted.

"Have you cabled Mrs. Gerrish?"

The man shook his head.

"I—I'm too shocked to do anything."

"I'll gladly do it for you," offered Baxter.

The valet mopped his face with a handkerchief whose texture made Baxter inconsequentially wonder if it had ever been the property of Gerrish.

"No. I'll do it myself in a little while, Doctor." His voice quavered, "wasn't there anything you could do for him?"

"There was nothing that I or any other medical man could have done," replied Baxter. "Hadh't anyone—his own doctor—warned him that he couldn't drink with the kind of blood pressure he obviously had?"

"I'd warned him," replied Ansted. "But he didn't have any personal physician. He'd always been proud of his health, said he hadn't been to a doctor in twenty years."

Baxter hid the gratification that this statement gave him. There had been the fear in his mind that the valet would insist on sending for another physician who might have objected to issuing a certificate that Gerrish had died at the hour Baxter stated.

"Too bad he didn't listen to your warning; he might have been alive now."

The valet stared at Peter.

"How did he happen to come to you, doctor?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Baxter, "unless it was that my name was in his mind. Last night I gave my name to two process servers. They were serving a summons in a suit brought by Mr. Gerrish, and I objected to the manner of the service. An intoxicated man's mind acts queerly. Gerrish must have felt an attack coming on; he must have realized that his condition was dangerous. And I suppose that my name entered his head; he probably forgot where he had heard my name, probably just knew that 'Doctor' prefixed my name, and so he came to me. But he seemed to have no recollection of me, of my having denounced the process servers last night. He simply opened the door when I pressed the buzzer, and asked if I were Dr. Baxter. I told him that I was, and he said that he was Gerald Gerrish, and said that he was sick. I started to take his pulse, having made him sit down first, and he collapsed. I looked up his name in the telephone book, and you know the rest."

Ansted nodded slowly. He hid his face in his hands. The door bell rang and Baxter released the catch. Three men came in. Baxter greeted them, conferred with them in a whisper, then turned to Ansted.

"I've told these gentlemen that they must arrange details with you. Is that all right?"

The valet nodded.

"I'll cable Mrs. Gerrish right away. There'll be an

answer tonight. If these gentlemen will take care of my master until then——”

No man, the saying goes, is a hero to his valet, and probably, Baxter thought, Ansted's sudden sobs were caused less by affection than by shock. Nevertheless, he mixed something in a glass, and gave it to the valet, who gulped it down. But he kept his gaze averted until the undertaker and his men had departed. Then he spoke to Baxter, and there was puzzlement in his small eyes.

“Did Mr. Gerrish come in a taxi?” he asked.

Baxter pursed his lips; he frowned slightly.

“I really don't know,” he said. “He didn't mention it. In fact he said nothing beyond what I've already told you. And I guess I was too rattled to think of anything else. Even to a physician the affair was rather startling, you know.”

“But no taxi man came in here asking for his fare?”

“Oh, certainly not,” replied Baxter.

“Could he have walked here?” asked Ansted.

Baxter hesitated a moment, as though pondering his answer.

“Yes,” he said slowly. “I see no reason why he shouldn't have walked. In fact, a man in Mr. Gerrish's condition might very well have been too nervous to ride in a taxicab.”

“But his clothing wasn't wet, and it's been raining,” said the valet.

Baxter nodded. He inwardly cursed his own lack of

forethought in not having moistened Gerrish's clothes. But how, he asked himself, could he have foreseen so shrewd a line of questioning.

"No, it wasn't," he admitted. "Probably he came in a taxi, then."

"But he would have asked the driver to wait for him, wouldn't he?" asked Ansted.

Baxter laughed.

"You or I would have, Ansted," he said, "but we're both sober. One can't compare the actions of a sober man to those of one who is intoxicated.

"I don't suppose we can," said Ansted. "He had no baggage with him?"

Baxter's forehead wrinkled.

"Baggage? I don't understand."

"He left his apartment late last night—no, it was early this morning. He carried a handbag with him."

"Wasn't that a bit unusual?" asked Baxter. "Why did you let him, in his obvious condition—he was drunk wasn't he, even then?"

The man nodded.

"I couldn't stop him; he was terrible when he'd been drinking."

"Do you know where he was going?"

Baxter waited in torment for Ansted's reply. It was slow in coming, as though the man were weighing carefully his words.

"Yes, sir, he said he was going to Miss Blaisdell's apartment."

"Going where?" Baxter's surprise was perfect.

The valet lowered his eyes, and the faintest flush appeared in his sallow cheeks.

"That's where he said he was going," he stated.

"But you didn't believe it," said Peter.

"I never doubted Mr. Gerrish's word," said Ansted. There was a trace of defiance in his voice now.

"Did you know that a summons had been served on Miss Blaisdell out on Long Island after midnight?" asked Peter. "Had your employer mentioned this to you?"

"Yes, he told me this," said Ansted.

"Then you knew that Miss Blaisdell was not in her apartment, but was on Long Island," asserted Baxter.

"I didn't know anything about it; I only knew what Mr. Gerrish told me."

"And what he told you, being evidently a falsehood, is something that might well be forgotten, might be set down to the unfortunate ravings of a man suffering with acute alcoholism," said Peter.

The man's shifty eyes were stubborn now.

"He took a bag with him," he said.

"Well, what does that mean? I don't think I follow you," said Peter.

He rose abruptly to his feet.

"I'm overdue in the country," he said. "I'm sorry to seem discourteous, but I dashed into town to keep an appointment with a patient here. I was about to leave—my nurse had gone—when your employer called. I really think I must be leaving now."

"Then you can't tell me whether or not my master had a handbag; you can't tell me if he came in a taxi or not?"

"What the devil difference do either of those things make? He's dead, and that seems to me to be the only important thing. What's in your mind?"

"I don't exactly know myself," replied Ansted. "All I can say is that I think it's funny."

"What's funny?" demanded Peter.

The man moved uneasily in his chair. Nevertheless, although it was obvious that it was a tremendous effort for him to meet Peter's gaze, his eyes were fastened on the physician's face.

"I think everything about his death is funny," he said. "First off, he leaves his apartment at five in the morning carrying a handbag and telling me that he's going to Miss Blaisdell's apartment. Six or seven hours later he turns up in your office and dies. He didn't know you. I'd never heard him mention your name until early this morning and he talked everything over with me. And last night you butted in and told the men serving summons on Miss Blaisdell that my employer was a blackmailer. It's pretty hard for me to understand why he would go to you for treatment after that."

"I've tried to explain to you the process of a drunken man's mind," said Peter.

"And the explanation doesn't seem to register with me," said Ansted. "I just don't get it."

Into Baxter's voice came that harshness which seemed

to contrast so strangely with the gaiety of his blue eyes.

"You'd better make yourself a bit clearer," he said.

And now the man's stubborn defiance became bold impertinence.

"If I were clear in my own mind you can bet your life I'd make it clear to you," he said. "And when it does become clear to me I'll certainly let you know what I'm driving at."

"You're English, aren't you?" asked Baxter.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"The English laws are very severe about blackmail and kindred matters, aren't they? And I suppose any Englishman would be justified in thinking that our laws were by comparison very mild. But they really aren't. When we catch a blackmailer over here we're apt to treat him just as severely as he is treated in England. That is, if sufficient pressure is brought to bear upon our prosecuting officials. There would be plenty of pressure brought to bear against anyone who tried to blackmail Miss Blaisdell. Your employer didn't realize that. I think it would be well if you did."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Ansted.

"Yes you do. You know perfectly well that if your employer said he was going to Miss Blaisdell's apartment he lied. She wasn't there. If she were, she wouldn't let him in. Furthermore, your employer knew that she was on Long Island."

"She could have come back, couldn't she?"

"That sounds plausible, doesn't it? That she'd have a rendezvous with a man who had been blackmailing her."

"Stranger things have happened," said Ansted insolently. "I want to know where he was from five this morning until he came in here."

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Baxter. "If you aren't satisfied with what I've told you, why don't you call in the police?"

Ansted rose from his chair.

"Thanks for the suggestion," he said. "I may do that very thing."

Chapter XVI

C RANSTON, Gerrish's handbag tucked under one arm so that the initials would not show, and with Martha's suitcase dangling from the other, had the peculiar feeling that what he was doing had happened before. The ride down in the elevator, the brief walk to his parked car, the placing of Martha's bag in the rumble and the putting of the handbag on the floor in front—all these things seemed a repeated experience. Yet, even as he marveled at the phenomenon, he understood it. Shock sometimes renders one side of the brain infinitesimally less quick of reception than the other; by the time the slower half of the brain has become aware of something, that something has become memory to the quicker half. At least, so some alleged scientists had explained the matter to Cranston.

Nevertheless, though the thing was understandable, it was a bit terrifying. Then he grinned at his own alarm. He had told Martha she mustn't think of danger and that there was no danger. It would be well for him if he profited by the advice he had given her.

As he pressed upon the starter he glanced at her. It was miraculous what a touch of rouge and a trace of powder could do for a woman. Men bolstered up their courage with a jolt of Scotch; women applied external reme-

dies. There she was, as fresh as though she had slept nine hours last night instead of less than three, as though she had experienced no nerve-devastating tragedy this morning.

But an actor, he realized, can banish from his face all signs of depression or unhappiness as he steps before the footlights, and all women are actresses. Give a woman the scantiest public and she becomes a different being from the person sitting alone in her boudoir. And the elevator boy, the casual passers-by on the sidewalk, had become, for the moment, Martha's public. Not to one of them would she let it become known that tragedy sat upon her shoulder.

The feeling that he had passed through all this before left Cranston as they turned up Fifth Avenue. The necessity of watching traffic brought alertness to both sides of his brain.

"You're wonderful," he whispered to her.

"I can't tell you what I think of you," she replied. "When I think of the risk——"

"We're not to discuss that," he interrupted. "Not until we get to the Lemming's. Talk of something else."

She did. Of trivialities, of little happenings here and there, of mutual acquaintances, of mutual like and antipathies they chattered. Had there been an invisible passenger in the car he would have testified that nothing beyond pleasure in each other's companionship was in the minds of either of these two.

The rain had ceased, and the summer sun shone more brightly than ever. Traffic was heavy on the Queensborough Bridge and upon the Long Island roads, so that it was an hour and a half after they left New York when they reached the Lemming place.

If the man who opened the door of the car for them was surprised at their return, there was nothing in his manner to indicate it. Yes, luncheon had been served and nearly everyone had gone to the golf course. Mrs. Torrance was with Mrs. Lemming on the veranda playing backgammon. Would they like some sandwiches? Very well, they would be served at once.

From the floor of the car Cranston picked the Gerrish handbag. While the man was busy getting the suitcase out of the rumble Cranston walked into the house with the small bag tucked under his arm. He went directly to the bedroom he had occupied last night and placed the bag in a chest of drawers. There was only the faintest chance that the room would be visited by a maid during the next hour or so, and that was a chance he must take, for there had been no opportunity to dispose of the bag on the journey out here. Then he went downstairs and found Martha with the other two women. He paused for a moment in the door leading to the veranda. He knew sister Letty as well as sister Letty knew him, and he could tell instantly that Letty approved.

Well, why not? Letty had never seen a lovelier girl than Martha Blaisdell, nor one whose beauty of character so obviously matched her face and body.

The three women looked up as he approached the table by which they sat.

"Martha told you anything?" he asked.

Trudie shook her head; Letty merely stared at him and in that stare he read approbation. He drew up a chair and sat down.

"That note that Martha left for you, Trudie," he said. "Who has seen it?"

Trudie wrinkled her brows.

"You and Letty and myself," she replied.

"Bob?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I told him there was a note; he was too sleepy to be curious. Nothing registered with him. He had a golf date at Glendale and staggered off still rubbing his eyes."

"The maid that brought it to you?" Cranston persisted.

"It was sealed," replied Trudie. "What's it all about, Herbie?"

Tersely, in choppy sentences, glancing around all the time lest he be overheard by a servant he told them the events of the morning. Not a word did Trudie or Letty utter until he had finished. Then Letty leaned impulsively over and kissed Martha on the cheek.

"You poor dear darling," she said. There were tears in the eyes with which she looked at her brother. "I'm pleased with you, Bert," she said.

Cranston colored faintly. Letty, deeply affectionate though she was in her heart, was always chary of praise.

"It's needless to warn you that you've heard none of this. Go upstairs, Trudie, and destroy Martha's note. Burn it. And remember that all the note said was that I was obstinate and disagreeable and that Martha had broken her engagement. And where can I get rid of Gerrish's bag?"

Trudie, ever practical, rose to her feet.

"I don't think you need worry about that, Herbie. After all, even if everything that happened came out, there's no question of any very serious crime. All you're doing is trying to save Martha from further unpleasantness. There couldn't possibly be any question as to the way in which Gerrish died. Or could there?" Her eyes narrowed as she observed the expression on Cranston's face.

"Certainly not," he replied. "But we don't want anything to be discovered that might arouse a question in anyone's mind. Where'll I put the handbag?"

Trudie glanced toward the Sound.

"You could put some rocks in it, take a ride in the motor boat and drop it overboard."

"And that's exactly what I'll do this minute," said Cranston.

Twenty minutes later he returned to the veranda again and sat down before a plate of sandwiches. An intimacy had already sprung up between Letty and Martha, an intimacy upon which Trudie beamed.

"That's settled," he announced.

"And the note's burned," said Trudie. "There must

be something wrong with me," she went on. "I suppose I ought to be frightened and have a feeling of guilt, but I never was so excited in my life. Imagine being part of a conspiracy to outwit the law. And I never thought I'd be hard-hearted enough to be glad that anyone was dead. But I can't find in my heart the faintest trace of pity for Gerrish. And what do we do now?"

"Behave absolutely normally," replied Cranston.

Trudie pursed her lips thoughtfully.

"I wish we dared telephone Pete," she said.

Cranston happened to be looking at Martha as Trudie spoke. As a matter of fact he had hardly taken his eyes off her save when he reached for another sandwich. He saw the sudden flush on her cheek as Baxter's name was mentioned and he frowned slightly. Why did she color? If she had paled that would have been more understandable.

Girls were funny things. Baxter had impulsively brought out a confession of love for Martha. At the moment, Martha's face had been expressionless. Cranston remembered having looked swiftly at her. But she had given no sign of hearing Baxter's remark. But she had heard all right. And the remark must have registered with her. No circumstance could be so bizarre that a woman would fail to understand such a statement as Pete's.

She hadn't reacted to it then, outwardly, but now she did. Again that utterly uncalled-for jealousy tweaked his heart. What sort of a man was he? Martha blushed because

now, calmer, she realized the full implication of Baxter's confession. At the time it had been part of a chain of whirling events, and though she had understood, excitement and terror had combined to make her ignore it. But now she colored with an embarrassment that would have been present at the time had there been room for embarrassment in the mingled emotions that overwhelmed her in her apartment.

"I don't think we ought to," he said slowly. "It might be awkward. We can't tell who's in his office now. I can't believe that anything has gone wrong, but if anything has, a phone from one of us might seem suspicious."

There was logic in what he said. The less connection there seemed to be between the doctor of St. John's Square and the people involved with Gerrish the less likelihood of anything untoward happening. Nevertheless, Martha felt ashamed of herself. Back in New York Pete was facing—perhaps—difficulties that should be faced only by herself. It didn't seem fair, somehow; it seemed cowardly. Oh, Bert had said it was safe, and Bert was right. Certainly he was no coward; he had proved his loyal courage amply enough this morning. Still, she wished there were some way in which she could aid Baxter. She visualized him now, blue eyes, untidy red hair, freckles, and angular body. Cranston broke in upon her reverie.

"How about a swim, if it isn't too soon after eating?"

For a moment she felt angered toward him. How could he be so callous as to think of pleasure when Pete was in

possible difficulty? Then she realized that Cranston made the suggestion to take her mind away from brooding. Too, he wished their actions to seem perfectly normal to anyone.

"I'll join you in a moment," she said.

She rose and the two women walked with her into the house. Cranston, left alone, glanced at his watch. Pete, although Trudie hadn't mentioned it, had intended to return for luncheon. Of course, the formalities with which he had been compelled to comply had precluded the possibility of so early a return. Nevertheless, he might have been expected to telephone Trudie. Trudie wasn't supposed to know of the circumstances preventing his prompt return. Had anything come up to prevent Baxter from being polite to a hostess who expected him for luncheon?

He tried to dismiss alarm from his mind and walked down to the pool. In the dressingroom he stripped and donned a bathing suit. He came out and stood in the full blaze of the mid-afternoon sun. Save for the gleam of water on the leaves, there was no indication of the fortuitous thunder storm of the morning. Well, nature had plotted to aid them; perhaps other events would do likewise.

He waited twenty minutes for Martha to appear, then plunged into the pool and was splashing up and down when Letty came across the lawn. He climbed out of the water.

"Where's Martha?" he asked.

"Having a nap; at least I hope she is. Trudie gave her

something that ought to make her sleep and she seemed to be dozing off when I left. Bert, I congratulate you."

"Even in spite of everything?" he asked.

"In spite of *anything*," she said. "If she isn't lovely in every possible way then I know nothing of my own sex. The poor dear darling. But it's going to be hard for you, Bert."

Quick suspicion appeared in his eyes.

"You wouldn't say one thing and mean another, would you?"

"I certainly would not," she said. "But I want you to be prepared. All Long Island is talking about last night at the Hyslops' dance. Well, Gerrish's sudden death in Pete Baxter's office isn't going to stop the talk. And what a grand young man he is," she finished.

"You met him this morning?" he asked.

"I managed to pry him loose from Millie Cragin for five minutes. And I can't say that I blame Millie. If ever a man had charm, completely outside the usual understanding of charm though it is, Pete Baxter has it. But Trudie gave me a hint that he can't see Millie because his eyes are filled with Martha. Is that so?"

He nodded.

"He said as much today when I balked at letting him take all the risk."

"Poor boy," said Letty. Then loyalty to her brother superseded any other emotion. "But he didn't take all the risk. It seems to me that you took plenty. I'm proud of

you, Bert. And I hope that no matter what happens, no matter what tongues wag or what newspapers print, you'll marry her. I just love her."

"Somewhere in the world there may be a sweller sister than you, Letty, but I'll never believe it," said Cranston. "Coming in for a swim?"

"I don't think so. Go ahead and finish yours."

"I'm through. I'll get dressed and take a few dollars from you at backgammon."

She jeered at him.

"Hurry up and try," she said.

But when he emerged from the dressingroom she was not on the veranda. He heard voices in the livingroom and entered, to find Trudie at the telephone. She looked up at Cranston.

"It's Pete explaining why he couldn't come out for luncheon. That man Gerrish came in for treatment and dropped dead in his office."

No one in the world, hearing her, could have told that she had been aware of the circumstance she now related over an hour ago. Cranston played up.

"Good lord," he exclaimed. "What on earth——"

Trudie handed him the receiver and he spoke to Baxter.

"What's this, Pete?" he asked.

"Gerrish came into my office suffering from alcoholism and died before I could do anything. So I couldn't make it for luncheon. Sorry to miss you. I hope I'll see you again soon."

"I certainly hope so," said Cranston. "I'm coming in town shortly. Perhaps you could dine with me at my house."

"I'd like that," said Baxter. "About eight?"

"Right," said Cranston.

He hung up just as Martha entered the room. He walked swiftly toward her.

"I thought you were taking a nap," he scolded.

"I tried to. I think I did fall asleep for a few minutes. But I just can't stay up there alone. Have you heard from Pete?"

"Just this minute finished talking with him. He's dining with me at my house tonight."

Fright showed in her eyes.

"You mean that——"

He laughed and hoped his mirth was not too hollow.

"Everything is Okay."

"Did he say that?" she asked.

"He didn't say anything to the contrary, and if it weren't all right he certainly would have mentioned it."

"Perhaps he'd have been afraid of being overheard," she suggested.

"You take that imagination of yours and do something to it," he said. "If he'd wanted to say anything private he could easily have gone to a telephone booth where no one could overhear. He simply wants to go over our stories again, just in case."

Slowly the fright left her eyes.

"I hope you're right."

"Of course he's right," said Letty.

"When are you going into town?" asked Martha.

Cranston looked at his watch. It was five o'clock. It seemed incredible that so much could have happened in so few hours.

"Pretty soon," he answered.

"Will you take me with you?"

"Now, Martha, you can't go back to New York today," said Trudie. "You're going to stay right out here. Why, you'll be all alone in New York, fretting and worrying. You're to stay here."

"Absolutely," said Cranston.

But the girl shook her head.

"You're sweet, Trudie. But I think I'll go to town. I have to go back there some time and it might as well be now."

There was decision in her voice and Trudie shrugged her shoulders, looking helplessly at Letty and Cranston. But despite the futility to protest, her lips started to frame one when the telephone rang. She picked the receiver off the hook.

"The New York *Blade* wishes to speak with Miss Blaisdell," said a servant.

Trudie put her hand over the mouthpiece. She whispered what the servant had just told her. Martha's face went white. Then, before Cranston could stop her, she seized the telephone.

"I'll speak to the *Blade*," she said.

Chapter XVII

THIS is Miss Blaisdell speaking," she said.
"This is a reporter from the New York *Blade*,"
said a voice. "Did you know that Mr. Gerald
Gerrish died this morning?"

"I just learned it a few minutes ago," she replied.

"He was your man of business, handled your financial
affairs, didn't he?"

"He had done so," she admitted.

"There was some difficulty, wasn't there? The *Blade*
is informed that he brought suit against you, claiming that
he had advanced money on your promise to marry."

"His claim was false," she replied.

"But he had made the claim, hadn't he?" insisted the
reporter.

"He had," she said.

"Have you anything further to add?"

"Except that I see no reason for a newspaper printing
so trivial a matter," she said.

"Nothing's trivial when it involves a name as well
known as yours, Miss Blaisdell. The *Blade* hears that
Dr. Baxter, in whose office Mr. Gerrish died, had quar-
reled with your business man."

"I know nothing of that," she replied.

"Then you've nothing else to say?"

"Nothing," she said with finality, hanging up the receiver.

Cranston stared at her.

"You did exactly the right thing, Martha," he declared. "I would have had you refuse to speak to him, and that would have made his story seem more important."

"I'll speak to every newspaper man who questions me," she stated.

"In which you're wise, although I wouldn't have said so a moment ago. Inasmuch as you admit the suit that ends all speculation. You deny its justice and let it go at that." His arm went about her. "You've not only courage, you have sense."

She smiled up at him. The thing she had dreaded, newspaper publication of scandal, had arrived at last, and, oddly, was not as terrifying as in the distance it had seemed.

"If it stops there—if they don't find out the other matters of today——"

"Don't even carry them in your mind," counseled Trudie. "Of course they won't find out."

Martha smiled, and only the two women knew the courage it took for her lips to frame that smile. Then she sighed.

"The worst—at least I hope it's the worst—has happened. There's nothing to be afraid of, nothing to run away from any more. You see," she looked at Cranston, "I'm being brave and taking your word for it that no one will discover where Gerry died. So all I'm expecting to

face is questioning about his suit against me. And I'd rather be in town, so that other newspapers won't say that I was visiting Trudie. Will you take me in now?"

"As if I minded what the papers say," protested Trudie.

But Martha shook her head.

"You've been kind; I won't repay your kindness by dragging you into this. Shall we go?" she turned to Cranston.

As she left the room to prepare for the trip into town, Trudie followed her, but Letty stayed behind.

"Bert Cranston, if you fail that girl in any slightest way——"

"What makes you think I might?" he demanded.

"I don't think you will. But scandal—only, remember this, Bert. The mere fact that you marry her will make people discredit rumor about her. And the sooner you marry her the sooner rumor will die."

He smiled whimsically.

"I'd marry her tomorrow if she'd have me."

"Good man," said Letty.

"It's funny," said Martha as they started off, "how a present danger is less terrifying than a future one."

"Shakespeare said something along those lines a long time ago," he smiled.

"Now that I know the newspapers will print something about myself and Gerry I really don't care much," she went on. "I know it isn't true, my friends know it isn't true, and what do I care about the opinion of strangers?"

If only," and her eyes darkened, "the other matter——"

"That's the one you're not to think of, much less mention," interrupted Cranston.

She wouldn't permit him to come to her apartment when they arrived in New York, so he left her at the street door.

"If reporters come I'll receive them. If you're there, they'll enlarge on their stories because you're so well known. I'll be brave and I'll be calm. Trust me."

"I will," he said. "But I may phone you tonight?"

"I'd be unhappy if you didn't," she assured him.

With that he left her and drove to his house on Murray Hill. As he rode along he pondered on the futility of our plans. We run away from something and when it catches up with us are amazed that we bothered to flee from it. The whole trip to Long Island had been unnecessary today. No, it hadn't. They'd got rid of Gerrish's bag; also, they had arranged with Trudie and Letty that Martha's flight from the Lemming house would seem to be a simple lovers' quarrel. But even that seemed unimportant now. Its purpose had been to minimize any relation between Gerrish and Martha, but that relation, or Gerrish's lying version of it, would be in the newspapers tomorrow. So the trip had been futile.

He hoped that all other fears might have been unnecessary, too. And contemplation of them made him wonder how the facts of Gerrish's suit had become known to the *Blade*.

Gerrish could hardly have notified the newspapers; his

office would be closed on Sunday. Of course the process servers might have tipped off the paper. For that matter, newspapers have a thousand ways of acquiring information. A great many people had witnessed the scene between the process servers and Baxter; hundreds of others had heard about it. It would be surprising if one of those people hadn't had some newspaper connection. Anyway, it had happened and there was no use fretting about it.

He parked his car before his house and let himself in the front door. The old servitor who had waited upon his father greeted him warmly.

"Wish you'd eat dinner at home for a change, Mr. Herbert," he said.

Cranston laughed; he had forgotten the difficulties of housekeeping.

"I intend to, if you can whip up something for a guest also."

Cregan, the butler, beamed on him.

"Mary and I were having a roast of beef and if that suits you——"

"Perfect," said Cranston. "Eight o'clock."

And punctually at that hour Cregan announced Dr. Baxter. At almost precisely the same moment Martha received a visitor.

Upon arrival in her apartment Martha had taken off her clothes and attempted to sleep. She had in her bathroom some mild sleeping tablets which she used rarely; this

evening she dared not try one, fearful lest it conflict with the tablet already taken at Trudie's. Furthermore, as she told herself, she was a perfectly normal and healthy girl, and it was ridiculous that worry, even as great as that which she had undergone, should prevent her from sleeping. So she closed her eyes, deliberately sent her mind far afield in search of pleasant memories, counted sheep, and did all the other things by which reluctant slumber may sometimes be wooed.

But she was awake when her maid entered her room. Seena started.

"I didn't expect you, ma'am."

"Did you have a nice time?" Martha inquired.

The maid blushed. There was a beau somewhere in the offing Martha had long suspected.

"It couldn't have been nicer," said Seena self-consciously. "Cook has come back, too. Would you like a tray in bed?"

"I didn't intend to eat anything, but I suddenly seem hungry. No, I'll have it in the livingroom. Set something on a card table there."

Neither Seena nor Olga had expected to prepare a supper for their mistress, and a motion picture theatre awaited them. Martha, sensing from Seena's attitude something of this, asked a question and received a reply to the effect that they had hoped to go out again. So she said that she would put away the remains of the meal and ordered them to run along. So it was that she was alone in the apartment when the front door opened.

For a moment she was not alarmed, thinking that perhaps one of the maids had returned or that one of the apartment house employees was making some not too unusual routine inspection. Then, as her visitor closed the door swiftly behind him and she saw his shifty eyes and sallow face, fear came to her.

The man sensed it and raised a hand.

"Don't scream, lady. I won't come a step nearer and you've got a telephone at your hand. I just want to ask you some questions."

The telephone was by her Martha realized. Also, unless he used a gun or some other weapon, she would be more than a match for this furtive sly-looking visitor.

"What do you want? Who are you?" she demanded.

"I'm Fred Ansted, Mr. Gerrish's valet," he replied.

Her hand dropped on the telephone.

"And why do you come in here? How did you get in?" she asked.

"I used the key that he used," the man replied.

"The key that he used?" she echoed. "I don't understand you. He used no key to this apartment; he had none."

"It was in his pocket when he died," said the man. "I found it when I went through his things at the undertaker's. I telephoned you this morning and you said he hadn't been here."

"Of course he hadn't. How dare you intimate that he had? Except when he came to call upon me, of course he was never here."

The man's lips curled.

"Naturally if he was here, he was calling on you. And if he called late at night or early in the morning he'd use his key, wouldn't he?"

"Get out before I call the police," she said.

"Don't be in such a hurry to call them," he advised. "Maybe after you've listened to me, you won't feel so eager to get them in. I know. You've all been smart as can be, but you haven't outsmarted me. My master came here last night, or early this morning."

"What makes you think he did?" she asked.

"Because he told me where he was going when he left his apartment."

"And you think he told the truth?"

"I've checked up on him. I've been working like any detective for the last six hours. Want to know what I found out? I'll tell you whether you want to know or not. He took a taxi from the corner of Fifty-third Street and Park Avenue, half a block from where we live, right down to this address. He paid off the taxi man and entered this building carrying a handbag. And if you don't think I can prove that—well, I can."

"Perhaps you can. Does that prove he was in this apartment?"

"Where else would he be? He didn't know anyone else in this building."

"Are you sure he didn't?" she inquired.

"He didn't have the key to any other apartment on him,"

said the valet. "I guess that would convince anybody where he went."

"I'm quite sure I don't care whom it convinces," said Martha. "Perhaps, after all, he was here."

"Beginning to think the truth is better, eh?" he sneered.

"I don't know what the truth is. You say he came to this building in a taxi. You say that you found the key with which you've just unlocked the door in his pocket. I can't understand it. I don't know what he could have come down here for. I haven't missed anything."

"You know he didn't come down here to take anything. If he came down here—and he did—it was to spend the night with you."

"That would be difficult, considering that I was on Long Island," said Martha.

"You could come in from Long Island pretty early in the morning."

Martha smiled frostily.

"I've listened to so much that I might just as well hear you out before I telephone to have you ejected. Go on. What's in your mind? I suppose it's the same filthy thing that your master tried to put in the minds of other people. But go ahead—out with it."

"I don't know what he tried to put in the minds of other people. I only know that he came down here to spend the rest of the night and that wasn't anything unusual."

Martha's eyes blazed at the insult, but her lips remained tightly closed.

"The only thing unusual was that Mr. Gerrish asked me to phone him during the forenoon. He said he didn't want to sleep too late."

"I not only don't understand you, but I don't think you understand yourself," said Martha. "And now I'll give you two seconds to leave here. You came in with a key not given to you; you're a burglar. I see no reason why, if you annoy me longer, I shouldn't turn you over to the police."

"You've mentioned them before," he jeered. "You'll tell them that I'm a burglar, eh? Well, listen to what I'll tell them. I'll tell them that Mr. Gerrish came to this apartment, that he died here. I don't know whether he was murdered or not. That will be up to the police. But if he wasn't murdered, why was he carried, dead, out of this apartment and over to Dr. Baxter's office? Why does Baxter pretend that he died there? He tried to tell me a silly yarn about a drunken man's mind acting strangely. Well, Dr. Baxter's mind must act strangely if he expects me to believe that story. I've been to every house on St. John's Square. And I've found two people who say that they saw two men carry another man into the doctor's office. Three men entered the office and only one of them came out."

He drew a long breath and stared at her. His cunning eyes were triumphant.

"Yet Dr. Baxter tries to tell me that he doesn't know how Mr. Gerrish came to his office, whether he rode or

walked. Now, where did they bring Mr. Gerrish from? Cranston had threatened my master last week. Baxter had denounced him last night. They both hated him, would have done anything to him, I guess. But where did they find him? My master wasn't in condition to walk very far last night, or this morning. It's just possible that he might have gone to some hotel in this neighborhood. But I've been to all of them and he didn't get a room at any one of them. And there's an all night taxi stand just down the street from here. And I've routed out of bed the man who was on duty there last night. And he remembers that very early this morning a man got out of a taxi, carrying a bag, and entered this building. He didn't come out any time in the next hour. I've got a man that'll swear to that. So he was here. What have you got to say to that?"

"He might, conceivably, have been here. But I wasn't; I was on Long Island."

"But when you came back from Long Island!" Ansted's voice rose shrilly. "What did you do to him then?"

"Had he been here I would have done what I'm going to do now," she replied.

"And what's that?" he demanded.

She picked up the telephone.

"Get me police headquarters, central," she said.

Chapter VIII

EARLIER today, Dr. Peter Baxter had suggested to Ansted that the valet call the police. The suggestion had terminated a conversation. Now, as Martha spoke to the operator, the valet's face whitened. He belonged to that all too common class of people who like to bully, to make trouble, to be over-bearing, but who are terrified when trouble turns upon them. In his heart he did not believe that Gerrish had been the victim of foul play, but the circumstances surrounding his master's death were sufficiently mysterious to excite his curiosity. Oddly enough Gerrish had won the man's admiration and affection. Because Ansted was a pliant instrument in the many little nastinesses in which the broker had been concerned, Gerrish had admitted the man to intimacies. In return for his friendliness he had received a dogged loyalty from Ansted.

Martha Blaisdell had contemptuously dismissed Gerrish from her life. Gerrish, needing a confidant always, had told Ansted of Martha's treatment of him and of Cranston's threats. Now that Gerrish had died suddenly, gratitude for the dead man's confidences made the valet troublesome.

But the police were people whom he did not care to face at the moment. After all, despite the evidence which he

had gathered during the day, he had only the vaguest sort of charges to bring. And his entry into Martha's apartment might very well bring him into difficulties.

He held up a trembling hand.

"Don't do that, Miss Blaisdell," he said in quick panic. "I'll get out."

He did get out; as she lowered the receiver into place he wheeled and almost ran from the room. Not until he was out upon the sidewalk again did coolness return to him. She was bluffing, he told himself. Why, if he told the police his suspicions, she would be involved in scandal that she could never live down. Only, if she weren't bluffing, the fact that she had called the police, that he had forced himself into her presence, might not look well. When crime has been committed, one who is aware of the fact ought to go directly to the police; if one aware of transgression temporizes with the guilty party he lays himself open to suspicion.

Ansted told himself this as he walked slowly toward Broadway. But he didn't have enough to take to the police. His mean heart pounded with excited rage as he realized this. His loyalty to Gerrish made him hate the people whom Gerrish hated. If there were only some way of wreaking upon them the injury that Gerrish had planned for them!

One cannot serve a scoundrel for many years without becoming a scoundrel himself. Gerrish, by his admission to intimacy, had made his friends the friends of the valet,

and his enemies the enemies of Ansted. In his heart Ansted knew that Martha had not been the mistress of Gerrish. He had been shrewd enough to realize when his master lied, but his shrewdness in no way lessened his regard for Gerrish. Like master like man is as true as like father like son. All the venom that had been in Gerrish was transferred upon his death to Ansted. And it was in a mood of impotent fury that the valet stepped into a speakeasy on Forty-third Street.

He had walked all the way uptown; the unwonted exercise on this hot summer night had not improved his temper. And three highballs combined with excitement and the sultriness of the atmosphere to make him reckless, eager to talk. And it is a peculiar fact that although we may find the world deaf to praise, there are always ears at hand to listen to slander.

Such ears were present in the speakeasy as Ansted entered. They were attached to a round head upon which black hair grew sleekly. Bird-like eyes, that looked upon an object, appraised it, and looked elsewhere, were set on either side of a hawk-like nose in that round head. Thin lips, always ready to curl in a mocking jeer, were beneath the nose. In short, the countenance belonged to Georgie Gotham, which was the *nom de plume* of the man advertised as the roving reporter of the *Planet*.

Gotham never forgot a face, any more than he ever forgot a bit of news. He had once attended a party given by Gerry Gerrish. To his credit be it said that he had

never attended another. As he once told an intimate, "I'll print stuff that comes from the gutter but I won't go into the gutter looking for it." Not too convincing a declaration of principle, but better than no principle at all.

He recognized now the sallow moody face of Ansted. It took him a moment to place the man, but when he did his thin lips puckered faintly. He had been in the *Planet* office today and had heard other reporters mention Gerrish's death, and he had listened to comment on Martha Blaisdell's admission that the dead man had brought suit against her. It was the kind of story that Gotham would have liked to use, but the fact that it was already known to the press at large barred it so far as he was concerned. He never rehashed things in his writings.

But now he stared curiously at Ansted. Of course, it was natural enough that the man should seek a certain solace in liquor; losing his master also meant losing his job, probably. There was nothing extraordinary in the fact that the valet should indulge in a drink or two. But there was an air of suppressed excitement about the man that didn't seem to bear any relation to grief or depression. Impulsively—many of his best news stories had been the result of impulse—Gotham rose from his table and walked over to Ansted.

"You were Gerrish's man, weren't you? I'm Gotham of the *Planet*. I seem to remember having seen you at a party Gerrish gave last year."

He sat down casually, easily, and signalled a waiter.

"Tough luck about Gerrish," he went on. "I didn't know he hit the booze as hard as all that. I've seen him hitting it up around town, but not like a real drunkard.

"He wasn't a real drunkard," said Ansted hotly. "He'd been drinking heavily recently, but that was because he was depressed."

"What was on his mind?" asked Gotham. "But I suppose he felt pretty badly about Miss Blaisdell. Sort of a lousy trick, bringing that suit against her, at that. But he's dead, and I suppose we shouldn't judge him harshly. Maybe if he'd lived he'd have withdrawn it."

"Why would he have withdrawn it," demanded Ansted angrily. "He gave her money and she was glad to get it."

Gotham shrugged.

"Oh, well, it's just one of those things. Don't you think you've had enough?" he asked, as Ansted now beckoned a waiter. "You don't want to pop off the way your boss did, do you?"

"How do you know how he popped off?" demanded Ansted.

"Cerebral hemorrhage, brought on by excessive alcohol. Isn't that it?" He asked the question idly, making conversation until he should finish his drink. He was utterly unprepared for Ansted's reply.

"That's what Dr. Baxter says," sneered the valet. "A doctor can say anything, can't he? You or I could walk into any doctor's office and if we died there, the doctor's word would be taken as to the cause of death, wouldn't it?"

Gotham's mind was instantly alert. The vaporings of semi-drunken men seldom amounted to anything, but sometimes they were exceedingly important.

"Well, why not?"

"What would my master be doing in Dr. Baxter's office?" cried Ansted. "He didn't know the doctor. He'd never met him. But last night Dr. Baxter talked to some process servers about Mr. Gerrish. And Mr. Gerrish never went there for treatment. He went there to tell Baxter where he headed in—if he went there at all."

The valet downed his drink and instantly, unmindful of his advice of a moment ago, Gotham called the waiter and another drink was set before the man.

"You must be cockeyed," said Gotham contemptuously. His derision was carefully assumed. "If Gerrish went there—why, you fathead, he died there."

"Who says so? Dr. Baxter." Ansted's sneer matched the newspaper man's.

"Well, where do you think he died?" asked Gotham.

"I don't know where he died or how he died, but I know it wasn't in Dr. Baxter's office."

"You'd better go home and sleep it off," jeered Gotham. "The trouble with you is that you're so upset that a few drinks make you goofy. Didn't die in the doctor's office, eh? Where else could he have died? How could he have got to the office, and why would any one bring him there if he were dead?"

"Suppose somebody didn't think that where he died

would look too good?" countered Ansted. "Suppose they carried him to a doctor's office to avoid scandal."

Gotham smiled patiently, a little wearily.

"You'll be seeing things any minute now," he said.

"And suppose the two people that saw my master being carried into Dr. Baxter's office this afternoon were seeing things, too!"

"You mean you've got witnesses to that?" demanded Gotham. There was no sneer on his lips now; his voice was incisive and his eyes were hard.

"I don't seem so drunk now, do I? Certainly I've got witnesses. Two men carried a third man in, and only one of them came out."

"Will those witnesses identify Baxter as one of the men?"

"Do you think I'd be talking to you now if they would? I'd be with the police, telling them my story, telling them all the things I've checked up."

"And what are they?" inquired Gotham.

Ansted was cunning; he had had affection for Gerrish, but he would have put money above regard had he been completely sober. Something like blackmail had been in the back of his mind all day. It had not been formulated, was not clear, but he would have esteemed financial reward more than the bringing about of justice in his more normal moments. But now he was intoxicated, and cunning had deserted him. Also, he felt that he had been rather shrewd in tracing Gerrish's movements as well as he had, and he

wanted to boast of his cleverness. Within fifteen minutes Gotham had not merely heard Ansted's story, but had cross-examined the man shrewdly, without finding a flaw in the tale. It was a whale of a story. There might even be a murder trial involved in the matter, although Gotham didn't believe this. Nevertheless, it was possible.

He stared at the valet, who was now nearly maudlin. He wouldn't dare, and the *Planet* wouldn't dare, to print the valet's statement. Not on the man's unsupported story. But if the police could be induced to take some action, the occasion for such action could be printed without fear of libel. Gotham went into action with that certain celerity which had made him an outstanding though not too admirable purveyor of news.

He rose from the table and walked over to the bar.

"Tony," he said to the white-jacketed attendant, "there's a stew at the table. He's not too cockeyed, but I want him cold sober in fifteen minutes. It doesn't matter whether he likes it or not. Give him the works."

Tony nodded comprehendingly.

"He's practically a tee-totaler this minute," he grinned.

He mixed something in a glass and walked around the bar to Ansted.

"Drink this," he ordered.

Ansted tasted the concoction, then set it down.

"This isn't Scotch, and I want Scotch," he said.

Without the slightest hesitation Tony slapped him savagely on the face.

"It's Scotch to you, mug," he said. "Drink it."

Ansted half rose from his chair, looking to his new found friend, Gotham, for protection. The newspaper man smiled coldly.

"Better drink it quick," he advised.

Other tables' occupants stared curiously for a moment, then turned to their own affairs. Too great a curiosity is not always healthy in speakeasies.

Ansted swallowed the drink. Even as he sputtered and gasped he was lifted from his chair and hustled through a rear door. His clothes were torn from him and he was shoved under a shower that was scalding hot one moment and icy cold the next. From somewhere in the building came a burly man who rubbed and slapped and kneaded the hapless valet. Within the prescribed fifteen minutes Ansted was pale and shaking and sick, but indubitably sober.

"Now listen," said Gotham. "You're coming to police headquarters with me. You're going to demand an autopsy on the body of Gerrish. You're going to tell the folks down there exactly what you've told me."

"I won't do it," whined Ansted. "I can't prove anything."

"To hell with proof," snarled Gotham. "You say you've got two people to swear that a man was carried into Dr. Baxter's office. You've got taxi men who brought him down there, to Miss Blaisdell's apartment, and didn't see him go away. Proof? What the hell! Any more proof

than that would *spoil* the story. It wouldn't give a good man opportunity to exercise his imagination, and believe me, boy, this is a story that needs plenty of imagination."

"I don't want to see the police," weakly protested the valet.

"Of course you don't; you were going to shake down Baxter and Miss Blaisdell and anyone else you could. But you're not going to now. If you don't come with me, I'll have a warrant out for your arrest in half an hour, charging you with conspiracy to cover up crime. Listen, yap, I could sick enough warrants on you to paper the Grand Central Station. Are you coming quietly, or do I have to belt you over the ear to make you nice and tractable?"

"I'll go," said Ansted.

Twenty minutes later the cringing valet was led into the office of Lieutenant Davis of the Homicide Bureau.

The policeman stared at Gotham.

"It's a long time, Georgie," he said, "since you've been covering this place. What's the matter? Did the boss get tired of libel suits and demote you?"

"The boss will stick an extra hundred in my pay envelope next Friday because I came down here," grinned Gotham. "And I wouldn't be surprised if my conscience can tell me to spend it all on a party for you. Do you know how many times a good reporter can stick a police lieutenant's name in the paper if he feels like it?"

Davis puffed at his cigar.

"Maybe half a dozen times before the editor wondered if you'd gone press agent," he replied.

"Half a hundred would be nearer the mark," laughed Gotham. "And every time there'd be a word like able, or shrewd, or brilliant, or untiring, or energetic—like the idea?"

"What's it all about?" demanded the lieutenant.

"I want a beat, an honest-to-God beat," replied Gotham. "Oh, I know that the other papers will get out an edition in twenty minutes, and that hardly anyone will know I had a beat except myself, but I want it. Do I get it?"

Lieutenant Davis grinned.

"Able, you said. Energetic, you said. Brilliant, you said. Twenty minutes ain't much to give to a man that uses the wonderful language you do. Shoot."

At exactly midnight Gotham walked into the city room of the *Planet*. The night editor looked up at him.

"What's on your mind, Georgie?" He impaled some flimsy on a spike. "I haven't seen you in the office for months. Thought you always sent your stuff down by a messenger."

"I always do, early in the afternoon, in plenty of time for the boys on the copy desk to give way to their instincts for mayhem. Gosh, it would be swell to have my copy read by some bird that didn't think he could improve it."

"And I suppose you came down here to beef about the extra commas the boys insert?"

Gotham shook his head.

"I came down to write a swell story. Boy, I've brought you a beat."

Chapter XIX

LIKE a tidal wave the waters of scandal and slander crashed over New York. Long Island, Newport, Tuxedo, Lennox, Narraganset, Bar Harbor, Chicago, St. Louis, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, San Francisco, Burlingame, Santa Barbara—only a gazetteer could list the places reached by the waves. In the remote places, of course, only a mild froth, a muddied foam, drew attention to the great upheaval. But there was hardly a spot in the English-speaking world that didn't know that Gerald Gerrish had died under suspicious circumstances, and that Martha Blaisdell, Herbert Cranston, and Dr. Peter Baxter had been visited by the police and sternly questioned as to their knowledge of the facts in the case.

Martha had been aware of gossip about herself, and had felt it too dreadful to bear. She had known that the *Planet* would print the fact that Gerrish had tried to institute suit against her, and somehow she had been prepared to meet this with courage. But she had not dreamed of the notoriety that would come to her if the facts about Gerrish's death became known. Dimly she realized that if she had not permitted Cranston and Baxter to aid her, the scandal would not only have been less, but would only have been about herself. But this way it was worse. Not only had

the two men been involved, but their injection into the affair had tripled the sensation.

Detectives had come to her some time before midnight. They told her that her presence was required at headquarters. She had gone down there, to be confronted by Ansted. She had heard him repeat to police officials the tale he had told her earlier tonight. She had no opportunity to converse privately with Cranston and Baxter, and when a soft-voiced official turned to her to ask questions, her nerves were stretched so tight they very nearly broke.

Cranston intervened.

"Miss Blaisdell is entitled to an attorney, as are Dr. Baxter and myself," he said quickly. "Martha, pay no attention to this ridiculous tale. It isn't true, and can't be proved."

The soft-voiced man—Martha never knew his name or his office; she gathered that he was an assistant commissioner, but had no certainty of this—leaned forward.

"You're perfectly right, Mr. Cranston," he said. "There's been an autopsy performed on the late Mr. Gerrish. The report gives the same cause of death that Dr. Baxter gave. There is no question of murder involved in this inquiry. But there is a question of law violation. You people aren't murderers." His smile, Martha noted, was as gentle as his voice. "But deaths must be reported according to formulas laid down by the law. Now if you good people would tell the simple truth about what happened it would be much easier for you. When there is a suspicion that

the circumstances of a death are being kept from the knowledge of the proper authorities, there inevitably arises a further suspicion that those circumstances cannot bear disclosure. You can send for lawyers; you can stand upon your legal rights. But in that case I assure you that I must stand upon my duty, and it would be my unpleasant duty to detain you all on a very serious charge. I would advise you to tell the truth."

Martha stared at Cranston: he was frowning and shaking his head. Baxter's lips were compressed, but his eyes signalled her a warning. She closed her own eyes and tried to think clearly. No matter how strongly the three of them denied the accusation, Ansted's discoveries, backed up by the testimony of the two people who had seen Gerrish carried into the doctor's office, were too strong to be refuted. She raised her head and Cranston read her intention in her opened eyes.

So did Peter Baxter and before Cranston could speak, Baxter's mouth opened.

"All right, sir," he said. "I'll tell the truth. I went to Miss Blaisdell's apartment to call upon her cook who had been ill. Recently I had a key to the apartment and let myself in. I found Gerrish there dead, and realized what a shocking thing such a discovery would be if known—and misinterpreted—by the world. So I managed to get him out of the apartment into my car and brought him to my office. I then pretended that he had come to me for treatment and died in my office."

Even in her bewildered misery, her desperate anguish, Martha smiled faintly. The dear blunderer. In his anxiety to save her, he was telling a story that would be punctured by the first question.

"The witnesses say," said the soft-voiced man, "that two men carried Gerrish into your office. You don't mention that other man, doctor."

"I was the other man," said Cranston quickly.

The soft-voiced one smiled.

"I don't know what you gentlemen are trying to do. Of course, you're trying to make it seem that Miss Blaisdell knew nothing about Gerrish's death. That's obvious. But it's also obvious that Gerrish died in her apartment, so it doesn't seem to me to make a great deal of difference whether she knew about it or not. Suppose we hear her story."

Cranston started to speak but the soft-voiced man became suddenly stern.

"You keep quiet or you'll be ejected—under guard," he warned.

Martha looked at the two men who had tried vainly to save her.

"You're both good," she said. "You tried so hard and have done so much for me. And I've let you be dragged into dreadful things. I'm going to tell the truth."

Slowly, distinctly, she told everything that had happened during the day. She was listened to in silence. As she finished and folded her hands on her lap in the manner of

one patiently resigned to anything, the soft-voiced man looked at her.

"I'm sorry one of you didn't kill Gerrish. If ever a man needed killing it seems to me that he was the man. You have my deepest sympathy, Miss Blaisdell." He looked at Ansted. "Your master probably saved himself a lot of unpleasantness by dying. You may save yourself a lot of unpleasantness by walking very carefully. I'm sorry for you three people. A newspaper man brought the matter to Lieutenant Davis. Had anyone else brought it to us, it might have been possible to keep it quiet. But we can't muzzle that reporter. There's not a chance in the world of that. I can only express my regret and say good-night to you."

Cranston gasped.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"I can't promise that," said the other. "The district attorney's office may object to what you did. For all I know, the medical association may decide that Dr. Baxter violated some of its rules. But so far as the police department of the city of New York is concerned the incident is closed. There are too many serious crimes committed every day for us to annoy chivalrous minded gentlemen who tried to save a lady from embarrassment. I think you're both great fellows, gentlemen, and I'm glad to have met you. That's all."

If it only could have been all! Martha, reading the newspapers the next day, almost wished that there had been

stern prosecution on the gravest charge. Because then there might have been some opportunity to disprove the thing that she knew all the world must now believe, that she had been Gerrish's mistress.

Men just didn't go to bed in a woman's apartment simply to cause her annoyance, to scandalize her. Her friends would believe that, especially if they had ever known Gerrish, but the world wouldn't believe it. And while she had managed to tell Cranston on Sunday that it didn't matter what the world thought so long as she and her intimates knew the truth, she had not visualized the newspaper headlines. It *did* matter what strangers thought, when one's name had become a by-word, when the press of the world had shrieked the story of circumstances that made her seem shameless. In agony, pacing up and down her livingroom, curling herself upon her bed restlessly to rise again, she recognized that life could never again be the same thing for her that it had been.

She was notorious. She couldn't face her friends again. She smiled bitterly as she thought of those friends. They were loyal, she knew; but was it fair to make demands upon their loyalty? Take Trudie for example; Trudie had telegraphed her Monday afternoon.

"I have tried to get you on the telephone and your maid says you won't speak to anyone, but I am not anyone, you silly thing. Bob and I want you to come right out and stay with us forever if you will, love."

Trudie couldn't be more divine. But Martha's presence

in Trudie's home would subject Trudie to all kinds of petty annoyance. Trudie would be eternally defending her; Trudie would be avoiding reporters and photographers. Trudie would be quarrelling with her friends because they might not want to accept Martha.

She even refused to speak to Cranston. Bless him, he had done for her more than any other man in the world would have done—except Peter Baxter—and had proved his love conclusively. She stared at a note that had come from him late on Monday afternoon.

“Dearest Martha: You must see me at once. I want you to marry me right away. In a week every one will have forgotten everything. Please call me up. I’ll be waiting by the telephone to hear from you.”

He had signed it tenderly and tears were in her eyes as she put the note away.

But that was ended; she would not let Cranston's shoulders bear a further load. Common decency made her resolve this. If she loved him, perhaps she could bring herself to let him shelter and protect and love her. But to take all these gifts from a man when she would only be able to give him a simulation of love—that would be too cowardly.

Peter Baxter had telephoned too, so Seena told her. But she had been unable to speak with him. God knew into what difficulties Peter's chivalrous action would get him, and she couldn't face him. Sometime later, when she was more composed, she would seek Peter out and thank him.

But not now, when her thanks could only hurt him. For it must hurt to accept gratitude from a person when what you want is love.

Monday night passed, and Tuesday became a thrown-away piece of paper that had once been a part of the calendar. On Wednesday morning the lawyer whom she had retained to go over her affairs telephoned her. He would appreciate it if she would give him thirty minutes of her time, so she told him to call at once.

He needed less than ten in which to make his report. If the great depression ever ended, she would have an income sufficient to support her very modestly. But while her stocks paid no dividends, she would be in receipt of no income at all. Too, there was no question but that Gerrish had advanced her several thousand dollars. His estate would be justified in demanding repayment. It would be possible to defer such payment for several months; in that time the value of her holdings might increase. If she sold at current prices it would cost her more than a third of her fortune.

"Sell today," she ordered. "I want that debt wiped out instantly."

"But that would be foolish," advised the lawyer. "It takes time to settle an estate, and every month, every day means something. The market may go up any minute."

She shook her head stubbornly.

"I want that account settled."

The lawyer nodded.

"I can only obey your instructions. But may I ask—not as a lawyer—what your plans are?"

"I suppose I'll have to find some kind of work," she replied.

"But Mr. Cranston—I had heard that an engagement——"

The look in her eyes stopped him.

"Could I marry him? Could I bring to any man the notoriety that surrounds me?"

"Mr. Cranston has suffered an almost equal notoriety," he reminded her. "I have only a slight acquaintance with him, but I am certain that what has happened could only make him more eager to marry you."

"Can't women be chivalrous also?" she countered.

"Chivalry is noble, but mistaken chivalry is so stupid that it verges on wickedness," he told her.

She was to remember this remark in the days to come, but at the moment it just seemed an attempt on his part to be soothing. And after he departed she tried to face the facts that hemmed her in.

It would break Cranston's heart to be married to a woman concerning whom there were any dubious circumstances. Oh, he was fine and all that, and loved her dearly. But more than love is necessary to marriage. There must be respect, not merely the respect which the husband feels for the wife or the wife feels for the husband, but the respect of others for them. Cranston would know that people smiled significantly when his wife's name was men-

tioned. They might have children; how would Cranston feel at being father to children whose mother would always be under a cloud? It wasn't fair to let any man undergo such a thing. She couldn't marry him, and she was nearer to loving him in this moment of sacrifice than at any other time.

Trudie was sweet, but she couldn't visit Trudie. A dozen other friends had written her notes asking her to stay with them, and she would never forget the courage of their kindness. But it was a kindness upon which she could not impose. It was a lax world nowadays, but the eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not be found out," had been broken by her. At least, the world would think she had been found out, innocent though she might be. And if she could not bring notoriety upon a man who loved her, neither could she bring it upon people who liked her.

The world seemed barred to her, she realized with quick terror. At least that which she called the world must be closed to her. Of course there were hundreds of millions of people whom she could meet, who wouldn't recognize her features, and there were places where she could live without fear of being known instantly for the heroine of the latest scandal.

But when she got to one of those places, when she arrived among these people—how would she live? Above the fear of notoriety loomed another fear, that of poverty. She had drifted, and all her troubles were due to her lazy drifting. Had she had the courage, at the very outset, to

face the facts, she would not have been the victim of spoken gossip or printed slander. But facing those facts would have meant giving up all the pleasant things in life, things which she had come to believe were absolute necessities. She would have had to go to work in order to support herself.

That was exactly what she had to do now. It would have been difficult to her, a strain to her pride, to have accepted favors for too long even when no breath of scandal blew upon her. But now such acceptance was impossible.

At best, it would have been unpleasant to realize that one needed the room so freely offered, the food so carelessly tendered. But when one's very presence might be an embarrassment, one could not add that presence to more material favors.

To go to work! What on earth could she do? She was pondering this question on Thursday morning when the superintendent of the building called upon her.

He hemmed and hawed and stuttered and evaded; but he made it very clear that the owners of the building would be perfectly willing to return her deposit and cancel whatever was due under the lease since the quarter began if Miss Blaisdell would find it convenient to move from the building. He tried to be apologetic, but she listened to no protestations of regret. She would leave instantly, as soon as her furniture could be put in storage, certainly by the first of the week. With which assurance he shamefacedly left her.

But she couldn't blame him. After all, the presence of a notorious female is no asset to an apartment building. Even in these lax days people are apt to prove fussy about neighbors who have figured too brazenly in the newspapers.

And it didn't take until the first of the week to put her furniture in storage. The storage people made her a cash offer for her effects on Friday, and on Saturday, having paid off and dismissed the weeping maid and cook, Martha left the place which she had called home.

On Saturday night she looked out upon a dingy street from the window of the room which she had engaged in a lodging house. She tried to smile bravely; after all, anything that was an experience was part of life and worth undergoing. That is, if one were a philosopher. Only, she knew she wasn't a philosopher but just a lonesome and terrified girl. She wondered if loneliness and terror were to be her companions for the rest of her life.

In sudden panic she went to the public telephone downstairs and asked for Cranston's number. Better to accept the fate of bringing shame to a man who loved her than to face unknown terrors. But she dropped the receiver before he answered. At least, if Gerrish in his death had robbed her of everything else, he had not been able to take from her courage. Wearily she went upstairs to the shabby room which was all she could afford.

Chapter XX

BERT CRANSTON had never been the impetuous type that rushed in blindly where wise men held back. He believed in utter and complete absorption in the task before him, and such concentration necessarily implied preparation. Those explorations which had brought him a measure of fame had not been haphazard snatches at glory. He spent more time planning a trip than the trip itself required. In short, there was little of genius in the Cranston make-up, but a great deal of perseverance.

Letty and Trudie and Bob Lemming told him what to do during the week that followed the great wave of scandal. He listened more attentively to Trudie than to the others because she knew Martha better.

"But she has to make up her own mind," he argued. "It isn't fair to her for me to rush her, to crowd her."

Trudie sighed impatiently.

"No woman ever made up her own mind. For that matter, I doubt if any man ever did. Events, the most trifling incidents, the slightest happenings—these are the things that make up a woman's mind."

Cranston essayed a smile.

"And am I one of the trifles that might sway Martha's purpose, eh?"

"Of course not. You're the most important thing in her life. But Martha doesn't know that; she can't realize it now. All she can think of is that she has been disgraced. It's your task to convince her that nothing matters except the fact that you two love each other."

"But she won't see me," he told her.

"You've telephoned her and you've written. I'm quite cross with you, Herbie. I suppose that if you sent her a telegram now you'd think you'd done everything possible."

"Well, what else can I do?" asked Cranston.

Trudie sighed again, this time pityingly.

"Herbie, I'm going to say a cruel thing to you. I think you'll make a marvelous husband but you're a very inadequate suitor."

"I didn't dream that lovely mouth could utter such cruelty," he grinned.

"I wasn't being funny," said Trudie. "I mean it. I'll bet this world is filled with men who are capable of tremendous devotion, but they somehow can't—well, woo a girl."

"And I'm one of that number?"

"What do you think?" she parried. "There's Martha, alone in her flat, going through hell. And you've telephoned and written."

"But what else can I do?" he defended himself.

"Did you ever, in the heart of the jungle, come to a stream too deep to ford and too rapid to swim? Of course you have, and you got across it somehow, didn't you?"

What else can you do? Why, you haven't done anything. I know what I would have done if I were a man and in love with Martha. I'd have broken down the door of her apartment; I'd have climbed in through a window. I'd have seen her face to face, and I'd have carried her off to the nearest minister."

Now Cranston sighed.

"That's what women think they'd do if they were men," he said. "But those things really aren't done, Trudie dear. Not with a woman of Martha's type."

"Her type is the type of every other woman; she isn't one bit different from me or Letty or any other girl you know. Oh, I grant she's lovelier and sweeter and more desirable, and everything else like that. But when she's in trouble—and God knows she's in plenty now—she's ready to be carried off by the man who loves her. Can it be that you don't really love her, Herbie?"

During the past week some of the brick-burn had left his cheeks, but now they were fiery red.

"That isn't fair, Trudie. Because I won't embarrass Martha by making scenes outside her window doesn't mean that I don't care. I do care, more than I ever dreamed I could. But if she'll have none of me, all I can do is wait until she feels differently.

"I'm annoyed with you, Herbie," said Trudie. "I mean seriously annoyed. Is it pride that stops you? Does a petty rebuff mean more to you than the fact that Martha is miserable? Don't you understand that there are times

when a girl must be forced to do the thing she really wants to do? She's letting her pride interfere with your happiness. Must you let your vanity interfere with it also? But that's what it is. No man really in love will accept a rebuff when he knows the girl loves him."

It was Sunday night, not yet dark. In half an hour the buffet supper which was customary on Sunday nights in the Lemming household, would be spread upon tables in the diningroom. Guests would drop in. Although Trudie rarely bothered to ask anyone on Sunday night, there were rarely less than twenty people and sometimes twice as many partook of her gayly-offered hospitality. Letty was leaving for Bar Harbor at ten o'clock. She had remained all week, lending her brother comfort. He had told her that he would motor her into town for her train. But now it seemed to him that Trudie was right; at least, if she weren't right, her suggestion should be acted upon and proved to be right or wrong.

He hadn't had too much experience with girls. His own idea had been that in time—he couldn't know how long—Martha would become amenable, sweetly reasonable. But perhaps Martha would feel as Trudie seemed to feel, that he had been lacking in eagerness. God knew that wasn't true, but it might as well be true if Martha thought it was.

Letty felt the same way and so did Bob. They hadn't put their feelings as bluntly as Trudie had done, but both of them had made it clear that they felt he had proved inadequate to a situation.

"I'll go in and see her now," he said.

"And you'll break down the door?" smiled Trudie.

He grinned at her.

"I'll tear down the walls," he assured her.

"Good man," said Trudie.

He left her and ran up the stairs to his sister's room. It was the first time in a week that his movements had been quick, elastic. His tennis had been listless and his golf perfunctory; even his swimming had been lazy and indifferent, during the past two days at Green Point. He had been waiting, and waiting leads to apathy. Now because he had at last decided to do something he was again the mentally vigorous man he had always been.

Letty called to him to enter. Her eyes widened at sight of him. Not only had she talked to him during the past several days, but she and the Lemmings had talked of nothing else but Bert. And she saw that something had happened to him the past half hour.

"Have you heard from Martha?" she asked.

The question which, forty minutes ago, would have brought a cloud to his eyes, did not disconcert him now.

"No, but I'm going to in the next hour or so. Trudie's been giving me a fight talk. Her idea is that I engage the fire department and ladder my way into Martha's presence. Well, I won't do quite that, but I'm going to see her. Without breaking down doors either. If I bribe a janitor to give me a key to her apartment I don't think she'd call the police to eject me, do you?"

Letty's eyes filled with sudden tears. She placed both hands upon his shoulders.

"No woman, and least of all Martha, is going to have you put away from her. Bert, she's the only one that can put you away. And don't let her! No matter what she says—pay no attention."

"It really *is* all right with you, isn't it?" he asked anxiously. "I mean—everything that's happened. They don't make any difference, those things?"

"If they don't to you, be sure they don't to me," she replied.

He scrutinized her closely.

"That sounds as though you thought they made some difference to me. Letty, I promise you they don't."

She patted him on the cheek.

"Of course they don't. Now you run along."

"But I'd said I'd drive you into town and put you on your train."

She smiled gayly at him.

"Sisters are sisters but sweethearts are something else again. You'd be surprised—and never dare tell Sim—how many men will offer to drive me into town tonight."

He frowned with mock severity.

"You behave yourself, Letty Torrance. There's a moon tonight; the air is balmy. I think you'd better hire a taxi. I don't trust you with impressionable men."

"And you couldn't have said anything more flattering. Bye. Bring her down to Maine, will you?"

"I'll use that as part of my sales talk," he laughed.

He kissed her on the cheek and whisked out of the room. Letty started at the door through which he had vanished. She shook her head slowly, thoughtfully. Bert was swell, but—he was Bert. He had behaved, Letty thought, magnificently. But was Bert the type to thrive and flourish in the shade of his own magnificence? Always he would react decently, finely, but there was within him an aloofness, an untouchability that he barely recognized himself. Martha was—well, she was as nice as Trudie had painted her; she was quite the loveliest girl that Letty had ever met. But would her brother always be aware of her fineness to the complete exclusion of other thoughts? Bert, warm with love, believed that he didn't mind the spattering, smirching, drenching wave of scandal. But would he, in the years to come, be conscious of that wave? She prayed God not. Oh, he would never show it by the tiniest expression. But if he felt it—well, she could only hope that he wouldn't. But character, no matter what the optimists tell us, is never changed by trial. It may be developed under stress; latencies may be brought out, but the essentials of character never change. And the chief ingredient in Bert's make-up was pride. Letty shrugged her pretty shoulders. Would that pride prove to be petty or prove to be great? One couldn't know. She heard Cranston's car grinding the gravel of the driveway. She smiled at the noise of the gears. Bert was starting off impetuously, and impetuosity was not one of his characteristics.

Nevertheless, recent as impetuosity might be, Cranston lost none of his new acquisition on the way to New York. And as he drove he scolded himself for not having earlier seen this light that Trudie had finally disclosed to him. No matter how much a loved one refuses consolation, it is the lover's part to offer it. Inadequate now seemed his letter and his attempts to telephone her. Well, he would remedy that inadequacy now.

The hallboy looked at him excitedly, as he entered the apartment building off Washington Square.

"Gee, Mr. Cranston, that was slick, the way you and that doctor got rid of Mr. Gerrish. Think of me not knowing a thing about it until I read the papers. What a razzing I took from everybody, because I was too dumb to know what was going on. Why," he went on in a burst of chivalry, "if you'd tipped me off I'd have helped you."

"I'm sure you would," said Cranston. He eyed the boy closely; then he produced a neatly folded packet of bills. He selected a fifty dollar note.

"Perhaps you'd help me now?" he twisted the fifty dollar bill around his forefinger.

The boy gulped. Fifty dollars was a lot of money. He wondered if there was some other body that needed removal and was prepared to assist in its transfer.

"You bet I would," he said eagerly. "What do you want me to do?"

Cranston forgot that he hated to have people know his business, that he particularly resented disclosing to a menial difficulties between himself and the woman he loved.

"Miss Blaisdell feels rather badly, as you can imagine. She won't see me. I want you to get the key to her apartment and let me in."

Nothing mattered in the world save seeing Martha; it was of no moment that a hall boy should be aware that the course of true love was running none too smoothly. Yet Cranston was blushing hotly as he finished. And then the color left his face at the boy's words.

"Why, gee, Mr. Cranston, I'd do it in a minute. I know what dames are like. What the hell, they get goofy, sort of, when something goes wrong. Why, I'd do it for nothing, if you came right down to it. But she isn't here."

"You know when she'll be in?"

The boy shook his head.

"I mean she doesn't live here any more. The superintendent gave her the gate. You know, a lot of newspaper chatter got his goat. The poor slob don't care what goes on in the place so long as it isn't in the papers, and believe me, plenty goes on here that wouldn't look well in a news reel at a Sunday school festival. But she's moved. She blew out yesterday."

Cranston stared at the boy.

"But she left no address?"

The boy shook his head.

"Not where she was going to live. She said to forward mail to her lawyer, and that was all. I can give you his name and address."

Cranston followed him to the telephone desk. He copied

on a paper the name of Johnson Pelley, Singer Building. Almost without realizing what he was doing he slipped the bill from around his finger and gave it to the boy. But even in that tip-greedy heart compunction arose.

"Aw, it's too much," the boy protested.

Cranston made no reply; almost in a daze he climbed into his car and started it.

Why hadn't he thought of this? Why had he taken until today to be persuaded into doing the only obvious, the only decent thing? Martha had pride; she had offered Cranston a way out of his engagement to a woman made notorious by circumstance. She had deliberately refused to talk to him on the telephone, of purpose failed to answer his letter. But probably for days she had been praying that he would force his way into her presence and break down the barriers of pride which she had erected. And he hadn't done so, and so she must have decided that his love was a feeble thing. He couldn't blame her if she had. He had been utterly inadequate to the situation, had failed her in her moment of greatest need.

A block from her apartment house he began to think more clearly. He alighted and entered a drug store and thumbed the telephone directory. Of course one couldn't find a lawyer in his office on Sunday night, but Pelley must have a phone at his home. He searched the Manhattan directory, however, in vain and was giving up in despair when it occurred to him that other people besides his intimate friends lived on Long Island. He located Pelley in Roslyn and got him on the phone.

"This is Herbert Cranston speaking. Could you possibly give me Miss Blaisdell's address?"

"I wish that I could, Mr. Cranston. I tried to persuade her that you were the one to whom she should turn. But she was stubborn. I don't know where she is. You're in the phone book, aren't you? As soon as I hear from her I'll let you know."

Cranston humbled himself, and found that humility was not too difficult a burden.

"Even if she doesn't want me to know where she is—you'll tell me?"

"Instantly," promised the lawyer.

Chapter XXI

IT OCCURRED to Cranston, as one remembers an unimportant detail that he had not eaten since luncheon. So he left his car parked before the drug store and walked over to the Brevoort. He sat at a table in the corner of the downstairs dining room and ordered dinner. And as he ate he tried to think. But it was utterly impossible for him to put himself in Martha's place. He could not hazard the remotest guess as to where she might have gone. He wondered how much money she had, and regretted that he had not asked Pelley about that. Well, he'd telephone the man at his office in the morning. In the meantime there was nothing he could do. So he finished his meal and walked out to his car.

He opened the door and stepped into the machine. He was far from a coward, but as he felt a hand touch him he experienced an instant panic. But his was the type that reacted courageously to danger. Panic could not stay with him long.

"Who the——"

Now it was not a hand that touched him, but something hard that pressed against his side.

"You cry out and you won't make any more noise," said the intruder.

The indignation that, succeeding panic, had caused

Cranston to begin a sentence and a movement of aggression simultaneously now gave way to caution, and words and action died in him.

"I've been laying for a chance to get hold of you," said the man. His voice became louder now and Cranston recognized Ansted. "I've been out at Green Point, but you're never alone. But now you are alone. I want to talk business with you."

"That's a gun in my ribs, isn't it?" demanded Cranston.

"You bet it is," was Ansted's reply.

"You can get ten years for this," said Cranston.

"And I can get the chair for what I'm ready to do to you," said the former valet of Gerrish. "Now you listen to me. I haven't any job. I can't get any job. Men have been looking for me and I know what they are. They're immigration agents and they're going to deport me. Going to send me back to England. And I'll have to live on the dole, if I'm lucky enough to get it. And it's all your fault. I don't care what anybody says, you and Miss Blaisdell and Dr. Baxter are responsible for my master's death. But she hasn't any money and the doctor hasn't a dime, and so you're going to pay. I want fifty thousand from you."

Cranston laughed.

"I suppose you think I carry trifles like that around with me," he said.

"You can get it," said Ansted grimly.

"On Sunday night?" laughed Cranston. One who knew him well would have known that when Cranston laughed nervously he was on the verge of action.

"Monday morning will do," said the valet. "And you know, I'll give you this: if you say you'll pay me, you won't call in the police. You won't break your word. Now I don't know just how much sense you have. But if you have any at all you'll know that I mean business. I'd just as soon die in the chair as starve. If you don't think I mean it, make a move."

Cranston had boxed at college; he had used his pugilistic knowledge in subduing mutiny in his expeditions. He could feel a relaxation that he couldn't see. He knew exactly that moment in belligerency when an opponent, having reached the peak of his effort, relaxes slightly. This relaxation comes sometimes in the middle of action and sometimes at the end of speech that just precedes action. It came now as Ansted ceased speaking. The last thing in the world he expected was for Cranston to resist him now. He would expect resistance in a moment, but not in the very second that he had finished threat.

And Cranston, alert as he had ever been in his life, twisted in his seat, caught the man's left hand with his own right hand, shoved it backward and upward as he swung his left fist in a half arc at the white blur in the gloom that was the valet's face.

It was ridiculously easy. Ansted had no strength, no resistance. He was a captive in Cranston's grip, a dazed and bewildered captive, in the tiniest possible fraction of time after he had finished his threat.

Cranston thrust the man's revolver in his jacket pocket.

He shook the man out of the semi-consciousness to which one blow had reduced him.

"You'd better let the immigration people catch you," he said. "I'm not going to hand you over to the police. I'm going to give you a chance to get away. But remember this. You'll never be able to do me harm. You're the kind of man that has to tell a person what you're going to do; you can't help that, Ansted. You have to work yourself up, and you'd never have a chance with me, or with any man that wasn't afraid. You've been following me, eh? And it might occur to you to annoy Miss Blaisdell. Better get rid of any idea like that. You're not afraid to die in the chair, you say. Perhaps you're not. But you won't die in the chair if you threaten me again. You'll die much more unpleasantly. I promise you that. Now get out."

He leaned across the man, opened the right hand door, and literally kicked and pushed Ansted into the street.

He started his car and before he had gone half a block the incident had practically left his mind. A danger past was nothing to think about. He had gone through too many dangers in his adventurous career to suffer any later reaction. And he knew men. He knew absolutely that Ansted, having reached his great moment of menace, was not the kind to have a second great moment. He had wanted blackmail, and now he had tried extortion; he wouldn't try anything again.

As he crossed Broadway a thought came to him. Pete Baxter might know something about Martha. This was

a ridiculous idea, he instantly told himself. Why would Martha communicate with Pete when she denied herself to the man she loved?

Nevertheless, if only for companionship, if only to discuss the horrid events of a week ago, he'd drop in on Pete.

He had some slight difficulty in locating St. John's Square, but he found himself there in a few minutes, and as he drove completely around the grassy enclosure he frowned reminiscently. Only a week ago he and Pete had done this same thing, in order to assure themselves that no one would see them as they took Gerrish into the doctor's office. Tonight he drove around the square because he couldn't at first find Pete's office. Now he saw it with the sign, faintly illuminated, "St. John's Clinic." He stopped the car and alighted. He crossed the sidewalk and would have pressed the bell, but that the door was ajar. He walked in and found himself in that large room where he had helped carry Gerrish a week ago.

"Pete," he called.

Then he backed toward the door. Baxter was not in his office, but there was a woman seated by the doctor's desk. She had looked up, startled, at his call. Recognition was mutual and instant.

"Millie," he said.

Millicent Cragin laughed.

"Don't retreat. You've found me. And you're very unsophisticated, Herbie. A gentleman of experience in these matters would never have mentioned my name. Then I could have hoped you didn't recognize me."

"Does it really matter that I recognize you?" Cranston laughed.

"I don't suppose it does," replied Millie. "Only we like the record of our failures to be a secret."

Cranston now advanced into the room and sat down beside her. He snapped a lighter to the cigarette which she produced from a case, and she puffed it.

"Failures? I thought that in the bright lexicon of Millie——"

She interrupted him with a wave of her cigarette.

"The lexicon isn't bright and the only illuminated word in it is the word failure," she said.

Cranston was deliberately obtuse.

"I wouldn't know what you mean."

"Well, your sister would and so would Trudie. Even dear old Bob would understand. But if you're too polite to comprehend, then be discreet enough not to mention that you found me here. Gossip I don't mind, but I don't want my defeat mentioned."

"And still I haven't an idea on earth what you're talking about," he told her.

"Well, I'm not in here as a patient. You've heard about Mohammed and the mountain. Well, if a young man can't be persuaded to come out to Long Island, or to drop in for tea, one must be a female Mohammed and go to the mountain."

There was no use trying to misunderstand any longer. For reasons best known to herself Millie was letting it be clear.

"And where is the mountain at this moment?" asked Cranston.

"Wouldn't you know? Wouldn't it just be Millie's luck? I slip quietly down here—and am I the brazen thing—and just about shatter Pete Baxter's sense of convention to pieces. In parenthesis, let me assure you that convention and Pete are bosom pals. He isn't one of those doctors that tell the ladies to come in for special treatment after the regular hours. Bert, he's naif. He's actually been out of his mind with embarrassment since I blew in here. And was he overjoyed when some silly woman telephoned in a panic that her child had broken his leg or his neck or something! I hope it's a neck because then Pete will come back sooner. And I promise you he won't be a bit excited at finding me still waiting here. I'd sent my taxi away when I arrived, and he offered to get me another because he was going out. Now what am I to do with a man like that? I wish you'd tell me, Bert. I found excuses this past week to telephone him, and when those telephone messages didn't bring him around I just came down here tonight. And I'll bet he'll stay out on that silly call hoping that I'll be worn out and depart. But I'm going to fool him; I'm going to stay here until he gets back."

Cranston lighted a cigarette; he blew a thoughtful smoke ring.

"You wouldn't make game of poor old Mr. Cranston, would you? I mean to say, it seemed to me that the real Millie was talking."

"The real Millie is dying to talk," she said. "I don't know what's come over me, Herbie. I usually can handle my flirtations decorously, suavely, with a practiced technique. I guess this isn't a flirtation. I don't know what it is. I just know that I'm too utterly damned miserable, and have reached the point where I want to tell someone about it. I'm in love, Herbie."

"Absurd. You're just playing games with me," said Cranston.

"Thanks for the exit, but I'm not using it. I'll talk or bust, and a busted lady wouldn't look pretty. Herbie, why should I want a freckled-faced, red-headed, gangling, obscure doctor? I hate medicine; I'd go frantic if my husband had to break a dinner date because a stupid patient chose to have appendicitis or a baby. I hate sick people. I'd hate to be married to a man whose life was devoted to service. I want a husband who will be devoted to me. I want a man that dances well, and likes to dance, and wants to stay up late at night making sprightly. In fact I want someone the exact opposite of Dr. Peter Baxter, but if I can't have Dr. Peter Baxter I'm going to break right down and cry."

Cranston stared at her. Women are strange creatures; they gave confidences—or withheld them—at the strangest moment. Millie would regret, tomorrow, tonight's let-down. But at the moment she wanted to talk and be talked to.

"If you want him, Millie, I can't see any possible reason

why you shouldn't get him. I don't know any man on earth that could resist you, Millie."

Millie lighted another cigarette.

"It may sound like boasting, Herbie, but I only know two. You're one and Pete Baxter is the other. And the reason is the same girl.

Cranston colored.

"I don't get you."

"Now don't tell me that the eyes of love are less acute in you than they are in me," scoffed Millie. "You know perfectly well that Martha knocked over Peter just exactly as she floored you. Now will you, for the general betterment of all mankind, and for the particular peace of mind of Millicent Cragin, please hurry up and take Martha off the market? I want to tell you that I can catch hearts on the rebound even if I can't always catch them on the fly. You'll be making three people happy the day you marry Martha: you, her, and me. And then, my pet, in not too long a time I'll be making Pete happy. So you see the great good that will be accomplished by your abandoning dilatory tactics."

"Dilatory?" Cranston was bitter. "Don't you think I'd have married her last Tuesday if she'd have had me?"

"You mean to say that Martha won't do it? What sort of man are you? Why don't you *make* her marry you?"

Confidence begets confidence. The frankness of Millie aroused an equal frankness in Cranston.

"I came in town to make her do that very thing, and I can't find her. She's moved, and left no address."

Millie's eyes narrowed.

"And you came in to find out if Pete had heard anything from her? Is that it?"

Cranston evaded her eyes.

"I hadn't seen Pete since Monday. No, I didn't think he knew anything about Martha. Why should he?"

"There aren't ever any answers to questions like that when you're in love," replied Millie. "But I can tell you that he doesn't know anything about her, because I asked him. And if that's all you came in for, you have your answer. I can't see any reason on earth why you should wait for his return. He may be gone hours and hours and hours."

Despite his mood, Cranston laughed.

"In other words, you want to be alone with Pete?"

"Silly of me, isn't it? And pushing and forward and shameless. Nevertheless, I'm all of those things. I swear, Bert, I think I'd do almost anything on earth to get that red-headed doctor to marry me and now will you get the devil out of here before I hate you because I've talked too much to you?"

"Don't hate me, Millie. And I wish you all the luck in the world."

"You find Martha and marry her: that's all the luck I want," said Millie.

Cranston walked out of the office and climbed into his car. He whistled softly as he drove away. Hard-boiled Millie Cragin! Millie, who took them all in her stride, who

broke hearts for the sheer joy of destruction, and whose own heart had never been stirred since Callie Curtayne died! Sort of tough.

But he forgot Millie before he had reached his own house. He was curt with the butler who let him in. He knew that his two servants must be as aware that something was wrong with his romance with Martha as everyone else must be. In fact, he wouldn't have put it past his sister Letty to have telephoned old Dan and his wife to look after him with special care. Indeed, had he found Letty here in intimate conversation with Dan and Mary it would have seemed quite natural. Dan and Mary were almost as much a part of the Cranston family as were Letty and Bert. But he felt that he couldn't stand sympathy.

He went to his room, undressed and went to bed. He had never been too imaginative but tonight his thoughts ran riot. What despair must have possessed Martha to make her disappear like this! It was dawn before he went to sleep.

It was dawn, too, before Martha went to sleep. This was her second night in the dingy lodging house to which she had resorted, and she doubted if she could stand many more such nights. She had spent all day Sunday taking stock of herself. She had no training. She could not be a secretary without months of hard training, training, too, which she could not afford. She doubted if she could hold a position as a sales girl if she were able to get one. For any office work she felt herself totally unfitted.

She lacked stupid conceit; she had never thought, looking at an actress, that she could do as well or better in the same part. She knew that whatever work she managed to secure would have to be something natural to her, the outgrowth of her life and environment. And she narrowed these outgrowths to two things. She could be a model or she could be some sort of companion.

She was pretty enough and graceful enough of figure to succeed as a model. But these were hard times; it must be difficult for the most experienced and popular mannequin to obtain employment these days. And there was an instant objection to such employment raised in her mind. In any shop in New York, of any standing, she would be recognized at once. If she had ever happened to patronize the concern, the first half dozen customers who entered the place would contain one who would recognize her. For that matter, her picture had been printed so many times during the past week that recognition was liable to meet her anywhere. There was another objection: she could not face the idea that she could earn her living only by display of her face and body. She had no cheap prudery about such a method of self-support, but vanity entered into it. However, this was unimportant. Even if she got such a position the storm of notoriety that would again break about her head would force her to abandon it.

Remained only, then, a place as governess. And she knew just where to apply, and at nine fifteen on Monday morning she entered the private office of Mrs. Detwiler.

That ex-grandame looked up with annoyance at the young woman who had refused to give her name but had forced her way into the Detwiler sanctum. Then recognition appeared in her somewhat rheumy old eyes. She arose stiffly from the very business like swivel chair behind her severe desk and walked past Martha and closed the door leading to the outer office. She turned back and took Martha in her arms.

"You poor dear darling," she said.

Martha released herself gently.

"Don't poor-dear-darling me," she said, "or I'll break right down and sob. I want a job. Now don't ask me questions about Bert Cranston; don't ask me any questions at all. I want a job as companion—I might even manage to teach French to a young girl. But I want an out of town job. I want a place among people who won't know me. Can it be done?"

Agatha Detwiler looked closely at Martha. Martha's grandmother and Agatha Detwiler had been belles together in the nineties. The panic of ninety-three had cost Mrs. Detwiler a fortune and a husband who had not been strong enough to face poverty, and the widow had carried on her agency for forty years. The elder fashionables of New York had never abandoned Agatha. To the younger ones she was not so well known, although there were a few, like Martha, who knew and were fond of her. These respected as well as liked her. Agatha Detwiler had built up a successful business in a day when successful business women were extremely rare.

"You'll have to change your name. I'll have to forge references; I'll have to do all sorts of things that will probably get me in trouble with the police and the state department, and I shall simply adore doing it," said Mrs. Detwiler. "You can pose as an English girl. Your name is Clara Tranter. I picked that name and that nationality, because a girl was coming from England to take a position that I had got for her. On the boat she met an Australian, fell in love with him and sailed last week for Sydney. She'll never be back here. She left her passport with me; she didn't need it any more, once she was married. There's a woman coming in this morning who wants an English companion-governess for her daughter of sixteen. The governess must be able to speak French fluently. This Tranter girl came from Norfolk; you know the country well. I see no reason why you shouldn't take it. Mrs. Gray—your prospective employer—lives in Blairsport, Michigan. She is a nice, well-bred, common-place woman. She has been a widow for years. She has no acquaintance in New York, none even in Detroit. Her daughter is a semi-paralytic, and they go nowhere. They don't even belong to the country club in Blairsport. In the winter they take a cottage in some quiet, not very popular resort in Florida, so that the daughter may have the benefit of the sunshine. It's a position that I would recommend to practically none of the young ladies on my list. It is too dull, too lonesome. But for you, at the moment, it would be ideal. For I take it that you want to get away from every-

thing and everyone. Which is understandable, Martha, my dear, only I would be untrue to my love for your grandmother and your mother and yourself, if I didn't tell you——"

Martha raised a hand.

"Please, dear Mrs. Detwiler. I've thought it all over."

"But you haven't thought of the possibility of staying right in New York. You've lost your money; I know that—everyone knows it. And you can't accept things. I know. I couldn't. But Martha, I could take you in here with me; I need a young woman to manage things for me, to be my partner——"

Again Martha held up her hand.

"I want to go with Mrs. Gray," she said.

Agatha Detwiler believed in offering advice but not forcing it upon people. At three that afternoon Martha entrained with Mrs. Gray, her new employer, for Blairsport, Michigan. She fought against the tears. Life was ended. Or so she thought.

Chapter XXII

CRANSTON telephoned Johnson Pelley on Monday but the lawyer had heard nothing from Martha. He called on the man on Tuesday, telephoned again on Wednesday and called again Thursday, but the attorney still had not heard from his runaway client. Cranston alternated between moods of black despair and violent rage. In the one mood life didn't seem worth living without Martha; in the second life didn't seem worth living with her. How dared she treat him so badly? How could she inflict such suffering on the man for whom she professed to care? If she was deliberately trying to kill his love for her she was certainly succeeding. Then rage would pass and hopelessness would enter upon its brief reign, and he would tell himself that nothing could ever kill his love for her.

Letty telephoned him daily from Bar Harbor; Trudie called him up at least twice a day to urge him to come out to Green Point. But he preferred not to face people. Save for his visits to Pelley he didn't leave his house until Friday.

On that morning Letty telephoned him. She hated to bother him, and it was the sort of thing she knew that a man hated to do, and she didn't suppose his seeing the woman would do a bit of good anyway, but would he be

an angel brother and call on Agatha Detwiler and look over the cook that Agatha wanted to send to Letty? No, Agatha didn't usually supply cooks, but Letty was desperate; Sim was such a *pig* about his food, and they'd never been satisfied since Marianna left them to get married, and Letty was sick of the ordinary agencies and she had appealed to Agatha, and Agatha said she had the most perfect. . . .

"If you'll just stop talking," Cranston managed to intervene. "I could have seen the woman by now and you would have saved a month's salary in telephone toll."

Letty giggled.

"Sim says I break down resistance and I'm glad to have his opinion confirmed. Why don't you come down over the week-end?"

"I think I'd better stay here," he replied.

"No word yet?"

"None."

"You poor darling. Don't you bother with the cook. You have enough on your mind."

He smiled.

"I'll see about your cook. Maybe I'll come down next week."

"Bless you," said Letty, and hung up.

He had found it impossible to get to sleep much before dawn these unhappy nights, so that he didn't awake until after ten. Letty's phone call had come through just as his eyes opened, and it was now after ten thirty. The cook would be at Agatha Detwiler's at noon, so he bathed and

shaved leisurely, breakfasted lightly, and managed to kill time with the papers until a quarter to twelve. Once he picked up the telephone to call Johnson Pelley, but the attorney had yesterday assured him for the tenth time that he would notify Cranston the very instant he heard from Martha, and Cranston felt diffident about bothering Pelley again.

He looked up Agatha Detwiler's business address in the phone book and decided to walk to the employment agency on Fifth Avenue. And as she emerged from a hat shop he almost bumped into Millie Cragin.

The pretty blonde detained him.

"Now, don't desert me, Herbie," she pleaded. "I'm to meet Jinny Gerardie at the Colony at one and I've nearly an hour to kill. If I'm left to my own devices I'll simply go shopping and put a strain on what remains of the Cragin fortune. So take me somewhere and save me from my own extravagance."

Cranston smiled at her. He had thought of Millicent frequently during the past few days and had found that he had acquired a respect for her. Her courageous frankness in Peter Baxter's office made him like her more than he ever had before.

"Where can a man take a girl at noon on a late August day?" he demanded. "Besides, I have things to do. Important things. I have to interview a cook for Letty, and I'd rather cut off my right ear. How can I tell by looking at a woman whether she can make nice desserts, or if she

minds being suddenly informed that there are three extra for dinner? You say you have nothing to do? Why don't you go and look her over?"

Millie eyed him shrewdly; she saw that his bronze face was lined, and that there were dark blots below his eyes.

"I'll take the job on for you," she said. "Where do I go?"

"Agatha Detwiler. The cook ought to be there now. The salary is settled, but Letty just wants her looked over. Will you do it?"

"If you'll take Jinny and myself to luncheon. You can't expect people to do things for nothing."

He hesitated, and Millie read his thoughts.

"Don't be absurd, Herbie. You can't hide away forever. Anyone would think you were ashamed. You ought to be proud. Every one of your friends is proud of you."

"They must be," said Cranston bitterly.

"Well, they are," insisted Millie. "You're by way of being a bit of a hero. You and Pete Baxter are living proofs that chivalry isn't dead."

"Oh, come, Millie," he protested.

"All right, try it out, if you don't believe me. Drop into one of your clubs and see what happens. Kill the hour between now and luncheon by letting people see you."

He stared at her.

"All right, I'll do what you tell me," he said.

He walked with her to the building that housed Mrs. Detwiler's office and then continued to the Mallet Club.

On this hot August day he hardly expected to find anyone in the club, but the week-end began this afternoon and fifty men used the club as a springboard from which to dive into Long Island or Connecticut or Newport or wherever invitation called them.

Cranston walked into the card room. Old Daniel Derwent dropped his shaker and rose from the backgammon table where he had been playing. In a voice loud enough to be heard half a block away he greeted Cranston.

"Herbie, my boy, this is a great pleasure. You don't drop in here often enough. Can I persuade you to join me in a little snifter?"

It might have been rehearsed, Cranston happily thought later. Every man in the room made it a point to greet him, to ask him to lunch, to dine, to play golf. Millie had been right. The world outside might think that Cranston had been involved in something unsavory, but his friends knew that he had defied the law only to protect a woman, and they didn't censure. On the contrary, if these greetings meant anything, his friends heartily approved of what he had done. No one referred to the newspaper sensation of the week before, but Cranston knew that it was in the mind of every one of them, and their approval gave him a glow that was still with him when he met Millie and Jinny Gerardie in the lobby of the Colony.

He saw half a dozen people—women—whom he knew and their greetings could not have been more cordial.

"The cook seems all right," Millie told him in response

to a question. "I've told her to take the night train and I wired Letty that I had substituted for you."

"You think of everything," said Cranston.

"Everything," agreed Millie.

The luncheon was pleasant. Mrs. Gerardie had to leave at a quarter to two, but Millie asserted that she felt greedy and must have dessert. But when she was left alone with Cranston she dismissed the waiter who had heard her plea for ice cream abruptly.

"I know where Martha is," she said.

Cranston's haggard face turned white. For a moment he couldn't speak, and when he did his voice was hoarse.

"What do you mean? Tell me," he demanded.

"Agatha Detwiler told me. It's just the sheerest accident that she did. I told her I was substituting for you, and that didn't move her. But when I said that I was leaving her office to lunch with you, she asked questions. How were you? Were you really in love with Martha?"

She saw the blush that now replaced Cranston's pallor, and she touched his hand pityingly.

"I won't harass you, Herbie. I made Agatha tell me what she knew. Martha is a governess-companion to a young girl named Gray. She's in Blairsport, Michigan."

"Governess? What on earth are you telling me?"

"The truth," said Millie. "When I told Agatha that you looked like death, that you are unhappy beyond belief, she blurted out the whole story. Martha came to her last Monday morning. She wanted a job. Agatha got her

one that very day. She is using the name of Clara Tranter, and she is employed by Mrs. John Gray in Blairsport, Michigan. Agatha had promised the poor dear that she wouldn't tell a soul but—well, she told me but only because she knew I'd tell you. It looks as though the next move is up to you."

"It certainly does," said Cranston. He signalled a waiter and asked for his check. "Mind if we end this luncheon now?"

"Next stop Blairsport?" smiled Millie.

"The next stop is Blairsport," he replied.

"All the luck in the world, Herbie."

"Thank you, Millie. You're a great girl," he told her.

"Am I? I often wonder," said Millie. Upon which enigmatic remark she waved him on his way.

In the ladies' dressing room Millie made up her lips and powdered her nose with an assiduity that she had not employed in a long time. The maid in attendance raised her eyebrows as for the third time Miss Cragin corrected a slight detail at the left corner of her mouth. The pretty Miss Cragin must have an important beau this afternoon.

But the maid was only partly right. There was an important beau—if a man loved but not loving can be termed a beau—but there was also an important matter of conscience to settle.

Millie was still wrestling with her conscience when she left the restaurant. She was still bothered with it when she entered the newsreel theatre on Madison Avenue a few

blocks below the Colony. An hour later she had come to no decision. On Fifty-eighth Street was another movie theatre. She sat through a feature, not seeing anything and hearing nothing. Still undecided, she took a taxi to her apartment. From there she telephoned the Doyles that a blinding headache would prevent her from arriving today; if they'd forgive her she'd try to come out for the week-end tomorrow morning.

She had the restaurant in the apartment building send her up a dinner. She ate it in negligee. Twice during the meal she picked up the telephone and asked for Baxter's number, and both times she hung up before he answered. Restless, she tried to read after dinner. Then she dressed, went downstairs, stepped in a taxi and gave the address of St. John's Clinic. At Forty-second Street she countermanded the order and was driven to a movie on Broadway. But at eleven o'clock she pushed open the unlocked door of St. John's Clinic.

Peter Baxter looked up from his desk.

"You haven't rung me up," said Millie. She was conscious that she looked lovely as she walked down the long room.

"I've been frightfully busy," Baxter said.

He rose and took the hand which she extended. She sank, with conscious grace, into a chair, and looked up at him.

"It's no use, is it, Peter?"

His freckles were submerged beneath a wave of color.

"What's no use?" he evaded.

"Bless the man's heart," smiled Millie. "Chivalrous always. You just will misunderstand, won't you, Peter?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Baxter.

"Then I'll have to put it in words of one syllable," said Millie. "Pete, I'm in love with you. Now where do we go from there?"

His embarrassment was agony.

"You don't mean that," he told her.

"Don't I. If you only knew," she said. She eyed him appraisingly. "Some day I'm going to give myself a great big laugh about this, Pete, but just now it isn't funny at all. You're the last man in the world I'd have guessed I'd care for. I don't like your profession, and I don't see myself in the picture at all. I'd be miserable as a doctor's wife. Yet that's what I want to be, Pete. I don't know why I want that, any more than I know why I've lost all my pride. You know, if you asked me to marry you now, I wouldn't do it. I would have pride enough to be unwilling to accept pity, even though I seem to have none left."

She raised a hand to stop the speech imminent on his lips.

"Don't say anything—not for awhile, Pete. Let me talk." She lighted a cigarette and puffed it for a moment. "No, I wouldn't want you unless you wanted me as much as I wanted you. And you'd never do that. I know it. I knew it last Sunday night when I did everything but ask you to marry me. You haven't telephoned me since I called here."

"I—couldn't. I—have been frightfully——"

"I know. Don't bother to explain. I've made it pretty hard for you. And in a way I'm sorry. You're too nice, Pete, to be made to suffer by a thing like this. And you're the kind of man that would feel miserable about this. And I'm contemptible to bother you about it. But you know there's a fiction in the world that sometimes women are surprised into recognition of the state of their affections. Why shouldn't that fiction be applicable to men? You're a shy person. It might take just my boldness to inform you how you felt. Only—*it is* a fiction. But I had to gamble that it might be fact. And now that I've had my gamble and know how you feel, I'm going to do something decent. I lunched with Herbie Cranston today. He's on a train for Blairsport, Michigan, right this minute."

Baxter's blue eyes widened.

"I don't think I quite understand," he said.

"I learned today where Martha Blaisdell is. I told Cranston. I know perfectly well that if he goes out to see her it won't take him long to persuade her to marry him. I didn't intend to tell you. I know you're in love with Martha. But if she marries Cranston—and she'll do it, and she'll do it right away if I know anything at all about women—you're the kind of man who will recognize that your hope is ended. You're not very modern, Pete. Lots of men, when a girl gets married, keep on hoping. They know there's such a thing as divorce. But you wouldn't recognize that. You'd die a thousand deaths and

then, a smart girl like myself might catch you. But I don't want to be smart. I don't want to be mean. So I've come down here to tell you. Martha Blaisdell doesn't know—she didn't ten days ago, anyway—whether she was in love with you or Herbie. Don't ask me to explain how I know this. I don't know it; I just feel it. But I'll back my feelings against anyone else's certain knowledge. Pete, Herbie is on his way to Martha. If you want her, act quick."

"Aren't you being a trifle melodramatic?" Baxter asked.

"Am I? Maybe I am. I think that all emotion is melodrama. I think that melodrama is life. I know that in the mood that Martha must be in it won't take much persuasion to make her give in. I know that you're in love with her. I know that Herbie is. I know that she feels she couldn't marry anyone after all that has happened, but I also know that any woman in her mood is easily won by the right man. If you care enough—what are you going to do?"

Baxter looked at her gravely.

"I'm going to take you home and prescribe for you that you go to bed."

"And you're not going out to see Martha?"

"Of course not," he told her. He hesitated a moment, fumbled with a book upon his desk, avoided her eyes. Then he looked straight at her. "You're a grand person, Millie. I think you're about the gamest girl I ever knew. I think you're swell."

She rose and almost ran to the door.

"I've a taxi here," she called. "Don't take me home. And—and—I won't see you any more, so—goodby, Pete. I think I'll sail tomorrow night. On the Bremen. The shooting isn't over in Scotland and the Teasdales want me. Goodby and good luck, Pete."

Chapter XXIII

THE chairman of the board of directors of the Missionary Medical Foundation looked around the table at his colleagues.

"Shall we ask Dr. Baxter to leave for a moment?" he asked.

A murmur ran around the table; the chairman interpreted it as negative.

"We have talked to Dr. Baxter and we have heard him talk. We have thoroughly investigated his record at St. John's Clinic. We know that he is not only an excellent physician and surgeon, but that he understands sanitation. We know that he is most emphatically the type of man that we need. But Dr. Baxter has figured, as we all know, in the newspapers as one of the participants in an affair that was most unfortunate. My own view is that Dr. Baxter behaved indiscreetly. But if I had a son I would wish that he, under similar circumstances, would behave with the same gallant indiscretion. There is no flaw upon Dr. Baxter's morals. Shall we accept him, gentlemen?"

This time there could be no possible misinterpretation of the murmur of approval that ran around the table. The chairman turned to Baxter. His thin ascetic lips smiled faintly.

"I suppose that outsiders would think we were rather absurd in being so rigid about the qualifications and characters of the physicians we send into the heart of China. Considering the small salary we pay, considering the life of sacrifice we offer, the world would be justified in thinking that we should be grateful to get any man no matter what his character or qualification. That is because the world doesn't realize that the medical profession is crowded with men who think nothing of money and who laugh at sacrifice and privation. There were fifty candidates for the place which we have assigned to you, Dr. Baxter. Not one of those candidates was a failure. Every one of them is willing to abandon an honorable career with prospects of success in order that he may serve mankind according to his conscience. You are going into the interior of China. Your headquarters will be in the village of TaiPing, and the nearest white man will be three hundred miles from you. You will live almost as the natives live. You will be there three years before you will receive a holiday. You will live uncomfortably; there will be time even of privation. There will never be any monetary reward worth considering. The chances are that you will never gain fame. It may be that you will have a chance to invent some serum or other—I am not a physician and do not understand these things, but I doubt if you will ever have the opportunity to contribute anything important to science. But you will be able to serve ignorant and ailing people. That will be your only reward, and this knowledge will be

your only solace in loneliness. You aren't even married; you will have no companion to share your trials. And yet, despite the hardships before you, I know that you feel elated and proud at the opportunity we are giving you. And we are happy that we are sending to TaiPing a man as capable as yourself. We congratulate ourselves and we also congratulate you, doctor."

Baxter bowed.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said.

"And you're leaving today?" asked the chairman.

Baxter smiled.

"I've turned over the Clinic to a young doctor who has occasionally assisted me. I go from here to the train."

"You were prompt," smiled the chairman. "We notified you on Saturday and you're leaving today. Two days is quick work. Good luck to you, doctor."

"Thank you again, sir, and thanks to all you gentlemen," said Peter.

He shook hands with the directors and went out into the sunlight.

He breathed deeply; his heart pounded with excitement. This was what he had wanted; his application had been before the Foundation for fourteen months and unexpectedly it had been acted upon. To give his life to people who needed desperately the services that he could give! To combat disease in a land of ignorance and superstition and misery! It was the thing toward which he had looked since he had entered medical school, the goal for which he

had striven. As his taxi took him downtown to the Grand Central Station where his bags awaited him he thought of Millie. Bless her heart; she was great but, even if he had been able to return her love, she could never have faced what lay ahead of him.

He thought of Martha Blaisdell, and his eyes darkened. By now Cranston had found her, had broken down her resistance, had made her forget the pride—it must have been that—which had made her run away. But he mustn't think of Martha Blaisdell. In the years to come the ache in his heart would lessen. Anyway, under no possible circumstances could she ever have cared for him. It had been decent and fine and chivalrous of Millie to tell him where she was, but it had also been ridiculous. Martha Blaisdell was in love with Bert Cranston; she was not the kind of girl who could ever have looked at his gangling figure, at his freckled face, and found him attractive. And he was glad that he was going thousands of miles away, where he would never encounter her, where at length she would become nothing more than a dim sweet memory.

* * *

Bert Cranston got off the train at Blairsport, Michigan, at seven o'clock in the morning. He took a taxi to a dingy commercial hotel, eyeing with distaste the uninteresting streets through which he passed. Perhaps the residential section of the town was pretty, but the business part prom-

ised little. What a hole for a girl like Martha to be buried in. He smiled. She would be easier of persuasion after five days here than she would have been on the first day. Perhaps it was as well that he hadn't found out her hide-away earlier.

He breakfasted, not too well, at the hotel, engaged a room, freshened himself with a bath, and at ten o'clock a taxi deposited him at the easily ascertained address of Mrs. John Gray.

To the servant who answered his ring he gave his name and asked to see Miss Tranter. His name evoked no memories of recent headlines in the maid's mind; she merely was conscious of the fact that the new governess had friends as nice as she was. She looked approvingly at the caller.

"Miss Tranter isn't in."

"She'll be back soon? Perhaps I could wait for her."

"Not until Monday night," said the maid.

Cranston's heart skipped a beat. It had taken all the will power he possessed to delay a couple of hours before calling. This was Saturday morning. How could he endure waiting three days and two nights?

"Where is she?" he asked.

"She and Mrs. Gray and Miss Sallie left an hour ago on a motor trip. I know they're going to see Niagara Falls, but I don't think they'll stop in any hotel there. They're visiting friends of Mrs. Gray in Buffalo."

"You know the name of the friend?"

The maid didn't but would make inquiries. For a man who wore a brown suit like this and wore it with such distinction the maid would willingly go to further trouble than this. But she returned to say that the only person who knew Mrs. Gray's destination in Buffalo was the butler, and that worthy had left the house half an hour ago for a day's fishing and would not be back until tonight. No, no one knew where the butler had gone for his fishing.

Disconsolately Cranston returned to his hotel. There was no use in going to Buffalo. The only thing he could do was muster what patience he could and wait until Monday night.

Saturday was torture and Sunday was agony. But Monday was brightened by the fact that the evening would bring Martha.

It did bring her. At seven o'clock he phoned the Gray mansion and asked for Miss Tranter. In a moment he heard her voice.

"Bert!" she cried.

"You knew it was I?" he asked.

"If the maid hadn't told me ten minutes ago that you had called I'd have recognized your voice, you silly thing. Did that wicked old Agatha give me away?"

"You really mean she's wicked?" he asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps not. You shouldn't have come here, but now that you have——"

"You'll see me?" he asked.

"Of course I will," she answered. "I can't ask you to

dinner. A governess must mind her place, you know. But if you'll come out after dinner—and we dine early—I'd love it."

"In an hour," he told her.

Mrs. Gray and her daughter, exhausted by the long motor trip, had retired when Cranston arrived. A servant showed him into a livingroom and he was alone with the girl he loved.

He walked to where she sat; she rose and his arms went around her.

"How could you do such a thing to the man you love?" he demanded. "You do love me, don't you?"

"I'm not sure, Bert," she replied.

He released her, but he smiled.

"It will be my pleasant task to make you certain, Martha," he told her.

She sat down and he drew a chair close to hers.

"I know what's in your mind, my dear," he began. "Scandal. But that's too silly. We love each other. At least I love you and I'm pretty sure that you love me. You mustn't let pride wreck our happiness."

"Are you sure you'd be happy with me?" she asked.

"A man who hung around this town for three days has served Jacob's seven years. He has proved his devotion fully. Happy with you? This I know: I'll be most miserable without you."

"I wonder," she said. "I've had time to think. I've been wondering. I still haven't made up my mind. I came

here because I had to earn my living, but also because I wanted to get away. I wanted to have a chance, without any pressure upon me, to make up my mind, Bert. I haven't made it up yet."

"Is that fair to me?" he asked.

"It's because I want to be fair to you that I ran away, that I hesitate now. Bert, let's not talk of it for a little while. I promise you, before you leave tonight I'll tell you whether or not I'll marry you. I want to see you a little longer, want to realize you're here—oh, I know I'm flighty and inconsiderate and everything—but be patient with me just a little while."

She rose from her chair, adjusted a photograph on a table, walked to the radio and turned it on. She glanced over her shoulder at him.

"Mind music?" she asked.

He recognized her nervousness and smiled at her.

"I don't mind anything," he told her.

Out of the radio came a voice.

"This is station WFKA. Through the courtesy of the Pittsburgh *Times* we are giving news flashes. The Caribou Flyer was wrecked at six o'clock this evening twenty miles outside of Buffalo. There were thirty dead and a hundred injured. The express train collided with a freight. Great heroism was shown by those not injured. John B. Curtis, former congressman from New York, entered a burning car and saved three women from death. Sammy Wilkins, member of last year's Olympic team, rescued two

men from the wreck. He probably will never run again as his ankle was broken. Dr. Peter Baxter, who figured in the newspapers two weeks ago in the Blaisdell-Gerrish scandal, was badly burned in an effort to save one dying man. The doctor had already dragged six people from the wreck. The injured were taken to the hospital and to private homes in the little town of Abdegong, New York. Senator Cadwalader declared at a luncheon of the Rotary Club in Birmingham, Alabama, that he would not run again this fall. Mayor Thaddeus C.—”

She shut the machine off and stared at Cranston.

“Did you hear? Peter! Abdegong. We passed through it today. Bert! We must go there—now.”

“Go there? What on earth do you mean? Pete’s all right. The announcer said that he’d saved other people.”

“But he said he’d been badly burned,” she cried. “We don’t know how badly. He may be dying.”

He stared at her, bewildered.

“But it’s a couple of hundred miles from here, isn’t it?”

She shook her head.

“Not over a hundred and fifty. We could do it, at night, in four hours. And we’ve got to do it.” Her voice rose.

“But why?” he asked. “The best of care is being taken of him. You must realize that. What can we do for him?”

“We’re his friends. I don’t know what we can do, but we ought to do something,” she insisted.

“But we’d only be in the way,” he argued. “God knows

if we could do anything for Pete—but we can't. I'll send a wire to the mayor of the town——"

"Can't we telephone somebody?" she interposed. "Bert, we just can't sit here doing nothing while Pete is suffering. We can't!"

Her voice was pitched even higher now. Cranston, looking at her, remembered Baxter's confession of love on that tragic day when they had found Gerrish's body.

"I'll do everything I can," he said. "If you want I'll get a car and drive to Abdegon now."

"That's what I want. I'll tell Mrs. Gray that I have to go——"

"But you can't go," he protested.

"Why not?"

"We won't get there until long after midnight. You're tired from your trip today. There won't be room in a hotel. You know a little town hasn't accommodation for the crowd that will pour in there."

"What difference does that make? I can sit up all night. I won't want to go to bed anyway."

"You're excited," he told her. "You'd only be in the way. You can't do anything."

"I don't care whether I can or not. I'm going."

"Please. Be reasonable, Martha. You heard that radio announcer. He said that Pete had figured in the Blaisdell-Gerrish scandal. Why revive that scandal? My God, if you go there, the papers will get hold of it and they'll print the whole thing over again. All they need is a dramatic excuse to revive it. You don't want that."

"I don't see why they'd do that," she said.

"Common sense ought to show you why. You and I and Baxter, united again at his bedside. Why, the papers couldn't overlook it. He came to your rescue two weeks ago. Now, you come to his. If you begged them to print your name and your picture, you couldn't succeed better than you will if you go to see Peter. I won't have it, Martha."

Her eyes hardened.

"You mean that because of more scandal you'd let me fail Peter now?"

"But you aren't failing him. I've told you that you can't do any good. You ought to be able to see that. All you can do is cause more newspaper talk about the thing we both want forgotten. Martha, if you won't do it for yourself, won't you do it for me? Stay here; let me go. Won't that do?"

"I have to go," she said. "Don't argue with me, please. But take me. Take me to Peter. Right away."

"And what about the answer you were to give me tonight?" he demanded.

"How can you ask me that now?" she evaded. "Bert, Peter may be dying. We have to go."

He stared at her a full half minute. Then he spoke.

"Martha, are you by any chance in love with Peter?"

Her face went dead white.

"I—I don't know," she replied.

"I do," he said. "Get a wrap and hat. I'll take you to Peter."

Chapter XXIV

ABDEGON, that little town whose name had been heard by millions of radio listeners and which in the morning would be in the headlines of every newspaper in the country, was busier at two o'clock this morning than it had ever been at two o'clock in the afternoon of the last days of the county fair. Notoriety had been thrust upon Abdegong; a few miles away the Caribou Flyer had crashed into a freight train, and all of Abdegong that was not turned into a hospital was turned into a receiving station for reporters and camera men and relatives and friends of the victims of the catastrophe. For the first time in the history of the little town the Abdegong House served a meal after midnight; the local drug store was doing business at two in the morning. The telephone operator would remember all her life that the White House had called to inquire as to the tragedy. Down the main street rolled the car in which sat Martha and Bert Cranston. The hours that had elapsed since they left Blairsport would always be a blank to Martha. She remembered going upstairs and telling Mrs. Gray that she was leaving for the scene of the railroad wreck. Her employer had eyed her shrewdly. She had been listening to a radio in her bedroom.

"The gentleman calling on you is named Cranston, isn't

he?" Mrs. Gray had asked. "And I heard the announcer say that Dr. Peter Baxter had been injured in the wreck. Is your name really Clara Tranter? You know, since the moment I met you in Mrs. Detwiler's office your face has seemed familiar. Now I know of whom it reminds me: of Martha Blaisdell's pictures in the newspapers."

"I'm Martha Blaisdell," admitted Martha. "And if Dr. Baxter is hurt, I ought——"

"Of course you ought," said Mrs. Gray. She looked at the girl sympathetically. She quoted Agatha Detwiler unconsciously. "You poor dear darling. I don't suppose you'll come back to me."

"Won't you want me?" asked Martha.

"At any time," replied Mrs. Gray. "You can be Clara Tranter here as long as you like. But you won't come back."

"Why do you say that?" asked Martha.

Mrs. Gray smiled.

"I don't know; I just feel it. But write to me, and tell me where to send your things."

Impulsively Martha leaned over and kissed the woman.

"Of course I'll write you. And I expect to be back in a day or so, so I'll just say au revoir."

She packed a suitcase and went downstairs. Cranston had not delayed. By telephone he had engaged from the hotel a closed car and without any talk at all he carried Martha's bag to the machine and assisted her into it.

She leaned back and remained leaning back for the period

of the ride. She did not sleep, yet she could not be termed awake. Once or twice Cranston offered her cigarettes which she accepted, and several times he asked questions about her comfort. Did she want a robe around her? Was the car going too fast? Would she prefer to have him ride with the driver so that she could curl up in the back seat and have a nap? But that was all, and none of these things registered upon her mind.

Pete Baxter had been injured. Bert wanted to know if she was in love with Pete. Was she? And if she wasn't, why had her heart almost stopped beating when the announcer mentioned the doctor's name?

The car stopped finally before the little hotel in Abdegon. Cranston alighted, entered the hotel and made inquiries. He returned in a moment, gave instructions to the chauffeur and in a couple of minutes the car stopped again before a brightly lighted brick building set back thirty yards from the main street. The lawn was crowded with people who milled back and forth.

"Pete's in here. It's the hospital," said Cranston.

Martha looked a question at him, and the agony in her eyes had its counterpart in his heart.

"He's okay," he assured her. "He's working on the injured."

Relief showed instantly in her face, but this relief did not communicate itself to him.

They pushed their way through the crowd and on the steps of the hospital a man exclaimed at sight of them.

"It's Cranston," he cried. "And Miss Blaisdell. Well, for heaven's sake, where did you two come from? And hold it, folks."

Beside them there was a flash of light and a puff of white smoke.

"Hope you don't mind," said the speaker, "but my camera man had to get you two. You remember me. I'm from the *Planet*. Give me a few words so that I can shoot them to New York in time for the first edition in the morning. Where were you two when you got news of this disaster? Were you together? Did you know Baxter was on the train? Come on, spill something. All I've got so far is tragedy; I want a little human interest, maybe a little love interest for the morning paper. You two weren't in Buffalo, were you? Not at Niagara Falls? My God, you weren't married and on a honeymoon?"

Cranston pushed by the man.

"Don't you think you've printed enough about us? Can't you let us alone when we come to visit an injured friend?"

"Be reasonable," said the reporter. "You people are news, and you always will be news, so what's the use of being high-hat? Tell me something, anything."

"We haven't a thing on earth to tell you," said Cranston angrily. He took Martha's arm and urged her past the man. The reporter shrugged. After all, their mere presence was worth a few paragraphs. And he'd wait around and perhaps they'd talk later.

A burly policeman checked them at the door.

"Friends of Dr. Peter Baxter," Cranston explained.

The officer looked doubtful.

"There's hundreds of people been trying to get in here," he said. He looked at Martha. Haggard though she was from apprehension and exhaustion, she was nevertheless the prettiest girl the policeman had ever seen. "I'll let you in," he said.

In the hallway was another officer. He too appraised Martha and discovered in himself a graciousness not too usual with him. The lord only knew what room Dr. Baxter was in or what he was doing, but he'd find out. He did and a moment later they ascended a flight of stairs to the second floor. A white-coated surgeon met them.

"Friends of Dr. Baxter? Well, I guess you can see him. He's about all in. Only quit work fifteen minutes ago. Burned worse than a lot of people who have been put to bed, but he refused to rest."

He led them to a door which he unceremoniously opened. There, upon a bed, his face swathed in bandages, but fully dressed, lay Baxter. A cry of pity burst from Martha's lips. She almost ran across the little room to bend over the injured man.

The blue eyes of Baxter flashed with a light unmistakable to any woman.

"Peter, can you talk? Are you suffering dreadfully?"

She could only see his eyes, nose and mouth, but the latter curled in a grin, and the eyes twinkled.

"I'm all right. Probably better than I ever was. Sometimes freckles are cured by a burn. Hello, Cranston. Nice of you two to come here. Mind if I don't get up?"

"You mustn't even think of such a thing," said Martha. "Pete, are you badly hurt?"

"I'm not too good," he admitted, "but a night's rest will fix me up."

Martha straightened up.

"And we're keeping you from that rest. We'll leave you right away."

He shook his head and the movement made him grimace with pain.

"Don't do that. I won't sleep for sometime. Tell me, what are you two doing here—together?"

Martha answered the implied question first.

"That's accident," she said hastily. "Bert found out where I was and came to see me. Over the radio we heard of the wreck and motored right over here."

"Darned nice of you," said Baxter. "Never expected to see you two again. Not for a long time, anyway."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Martha.

"On my way to China. Catching a boat from Seattle on Saturday. Going to a place called Tai Ping, to stay at least three years, and probably the rest of my life. Being sent out there by the Medical Foundation. Something I've wanted to do all my life, it seems to me, and the chance came last week. I grabbed it."

"You're going to China." Martha's voice was low, incredulous.

Baxter grinned, and then winced as the twitch of his lips made pain shoot across his cheeks.

"Might run into you, Bert. You might come moseying down from Mongolia or across the Gobi desert on one of your trips. I hope you'll tip your hat the way Stanley did to Livingston and say, 'Dr. Baxter, I presume.' "

The doctor who had admitted them spoke now.

"I think it's about time Dr. Baxter tried to sleep. You can come back and see him in the morning."

"You mustn't bother about me," said Baxter. "I'm all right. I'll be taking a train for Chicago tomorrow. To-day, I guess I mean. I can't miss that boat."

Martha looked apprehensively at the physician who stood by. He nodded.

"Dr. Baxter can make the trip," he said. "Those burns will be very uncomfortable for sometime to come, but he can treat them himself. If he gets a good sleep now he'll be all right."

Even as he spoke Baxter's eyes closed and his mouth relaxed.

"I gave him an opiate," whispered the attending physician. "You'd better go now."

Outside still lingered the persistent reporter, but Cranston pushed by him and helped Martha into their waiting car. He told the driver to take them to the hotel.

"I managed to engage a couple of rooms when we stopped there a while back," he said. "You need rest as badly as Pete does."

"He's going to China," said Martha. "For three years. Maybe for longer."

Cranston took her hand in his.

"Does it mean so much, Martha?"

She looked at him. Even in the darkness he could see a liquid gleam in her eyes, a gleam that could be brought there only by welling tears.

"It means more than anything, Bert."

She felt his fingers press her own.

"Well, you said you'd give me my answer before we separated tonight, and you've kept your word."

"Have I hurt you, Bert?" she asked.

"Why think about my hurt?" He pressed her hand again.

"I'll cure your hurt," she said impulsively.

He shook his head.

"I don't think that can be done," he smiled.

"I never really loved you, Bert," she said. "Oh, I'm ashamed to confess it, but I'm not the kind of girl you thought I was. I don't mean the dreadful things that Gerrish hinted at. But I do mean that I was the kind of a girl who would pretend to love a man when what she wanted was his money. And the hurt that kind of girl gives can't last long. Not when a man knows that she is cheap and mean and mercenary."

"And you expect me to believe that you were those things?"

"I am those things. I learned I had no money. I in-

tended to marry you, not because I loved you—although I think you're one of the finest men I ever knew—but because you had money, position, fame, all the things I wanted a husband to have."

"Why tell me now?" he protested.

"I just told you why. So that you won't feel too badly about me. Bert, you'd never have been happy with me. All this scandal, this dreadful notoriety—it will be unending. You heard that newspaperman just now? Every time anything happens the papers will reprint the story of what we went through. You can stand that by yourself. But if you were married to me, if the papers hinted at scandal about your wife—you couldn't stand it, you'd be miserable."

"I'll be miserable without you," he told her.

"But not for a lifetime, Bert. You'll think clearly, you'll see clearly. You'll see that we wouldn't have been happy. And you'll decide in your heart that I'm not the kind of girl to be miserable about. A girl who would contemplate marrying a man she didn't love isn't the kind of girl you'll break your heart over."

He tried to smile.

"You're pretty grand, Martha. Because you don't want me to be unhappy you try to make yourself out less nice than you are. But you can't convince me. The very fact that you try to prove you aren't nice proves how great you are. Are you going to marry Baxter?" he asked suddenly.

She felt the hot color sweep over her face.

"He hasn't asked me," she said.

Cranston laughed; there was no gaiety in the sound.

"It won't be difficult to get him to do that, will it?"

"How can I marry a man who's starting a new career, who doesn't want to be hampered by a wife? At least, he shouldn't want to be."

"But if you don't—what then?"

Into her voice came the merriment that was never too deeply submerged by unhappiness.

"I'm a most efficient companion-governess. Mrs. Gray doesn't mind the fact that I deceived her about my name. She wants me back."

"But, good lord, you can't keep up that sort of thing, Martha. It isn't the kind of a life you can stand. I never heard anything so absurd. A companion, a governess! That isn't the sort of life for you, and you know it."

"Peter hasn't refused to marry me yet," she reminded him.

"But a moment ago you said you wouldn't hamper him."

"That was a moment ago," she said. "Oh, Bert, how do I know anything? How can I tell you anything?"

"You can tell me one thing. You can tell me that if you're in trouble, in need, you'll remember that I love you and that I want to be your best friend on earth. Will you promise to come to me for anything you need?"

"I promise," she said.

The car stopped before the hotel. They entered. A bellboy, excited at the late hours, showed them to their rooms on the second floor. Outside her door Cranston lingered.

"Martha, there's an early train to New York in the morning. I'd rather, if you don't mind, not see you tomorrow. You see, my dear, you haven't cured my hurt, and the more I see of you the less chance there is of it being cured. The car will be waiting to take you back to Blairsport. The man is paid. You know where I live. If you ever want me—goodby, my dear."

Martha entered her room, to fling herself face down upon the bed, to weep as she had never wept before. But even through her sobs there was something of exaltation in her heart. Tomorrow, this morning rather, she would see Pete again.

Chapter XXV

THE sunlight streaming through the window awakened her. She sat up in bed, startled, unrecognizing her surroundings. Suddenly she remembered, but with remembrance came fear. Peter had been very brave last night, but he must have been in agony. His poor face. He had jested about it, said that it was a cure for freckles. But perhaps he would be frightfully scarred. She closed her eyes and tried to visualize a Peter without freckles, a Peter whose face was a twisted mass. Would she love such a man?

The answer came clearly to her: until she died she would love such a man. She thought of Cranston. How perfectly fine he had been. He had hated the trip to Abdegon, had dreaded the inevitable notoriety that would be revived, but that didn't argue any lack of fineness in him. But it had been one of the things that had made her realize that it would be unfair of her to marry him. Although that wasn't true; the moment she had heard over the radio that Peter had been injured she had known finally and forever that if she didn't marry Peter she wouldn't marry anyone.

She rang for breakfast and the waiter who brought her meal also gave her a note. She recognized Cranston's writing. She opened it with hands that trembled.

"Dearest: Whatever you do, whatever you decide, wherever you go, remember that a word will bring me. Bert."

That was all, and she was glad that it was no more. And though she felt shame and remorse at having hurt him, her heart was too full of someone else for shame and remorse to stay with her long.

She telephoned the hospital and was told that Dr. Baxter was much better, could indeed answer the telephone, and she waited like a nervous school girl for the sound of his voice.

"This is Martha," she told him. "How are you?"

"All right. Much better than I've any right to be. The doctors here are ready to discharge me. As the doctor told you last night, I can treat my burns myself. So I'm leaving this afternoon."

"Oh," she said blankly. "I'll see you before you go?"

"Of course," he said. "Where are you?"

"At the only hotel in town," she replied.

"I'll be over in about half an hour," he said. "Can you see me then?"

"Yes," she replied.

Could she see him then? Would there be any time in her life when she couldn't see him? In half an hour, eh? Well, that gave her time to drink a cup of coffee, to bathe, to fix her lips and her nails and to don the pretty frock she had brought with her.

It was a very pretty frock, a blue that went well with her

complexion, and the stockings and shoes were perfect with it. She adjusted her tiny hat carefully when the hotel clerk announced over the telephone that Dr. Baxter was calling and she descended the stairs confidently.

But the calmness of her expression was dissipated by his appearance. His clothes were torn and soiled. Of course, she told herself, his baggage had been lost in the wreck. But it made his somewhat gaunt frame seem leaner than ever. The bandages of last night had been trimmed down a little, but they covered still both sides of his face. Nevertheless, there was gaiety in his blue eyes as he advanced to meet her.

"Peter, are you sure you're able to go away today?"

He smiled at her.

"Absolutely. I'm not sure about the freckles though. Dr. Prendergast at the hospital says that I'm not as seriously burned as he thought. I'm afraid the freckles will come back."

"I hope so," she smiled. "I want those freckles there."

He led her to a wide seat before a large plate glass window that looked out upon Abdegon's main street.

"I'll send you a photograph if the freckles return," he promised.

"You think you'll need to?" she asked.

"What do you mean by that?"

"What do you think I mean?" she countered.

"I'm afraid to think," he replied.

"Fear doesn't become the man who was such a hero

yesterday. I've seen the Buffalo papers and they're filled with your heroism."

"Oh, that." He dismissed his actions of yesterday with a gesture.

She returned to the assault.

"I'll tell you, Peter, if the freckles don't come back we just won't take any pictures of you."

He looked hard at her.

"We?" he asked.

"We," she replied.

"Where is Cranston this morning?" he demanded.

"He's gone to New York, Peter. I'm not going to marry him. He's the second finest man I know, but I could only marry the finest. And I'm becoming embarrassed. Is the finest going to ask me to marry him?"

"You're mad, Martha. That is, if I understand——"

"Even so simple a person as yourself ought to be able to understand what I mean. That day when you and Bert took Gerrish—didn't you say then that you loved me? Have you changed, Peter?"

Agony was in his eyes now.

"Martha, I don't know what's happened. I only know that unless I'm insane you're telling me that you care for me. And it can't be, Martha. I'm going to China, into the interior, where few white men ever stray. I'm going there because I *have* to go. Don't ask me why because I couldn't answer you. Sometimes I look at myself and ask myself if it's a great vanity that makes me want to bury

myself in Tai Ping. There are, you know," and whimsicality was in his voice, "such things, the modern psychologists tell us, as martyr complexes. Science seems to have the occasional unhappy faculty of making life too obvious and what we think are virtues are mere responses to our needs. I don't know. If it isn't too great an impertinence to think that God would deign to notice me, I would feel that I had been called by Him. But anyway, no matter why I'm going, I am going. I have to go."

"Whither thou goest," she smiled.

"You can't mean that. Are you trying to tell me that you want to share the life I'll lead in China?"

"I'm trying to tell you what you told me two weeks ago, that I love you," she said.

He moved away from her slightly and the trembling of his body communicated itself to his voice.

"I won't listen to such a thing," he said. "I haven't the right to listen."

"And you deny me the right to be heard?" she demanded.

"Because you don't know what you're saying, Martha, I can't be turned aside. I have my destiny as I see it and it must be fulfilled. And to let a gentle thing like you share that destiny——"

She laughed at him.

"Oh, not so gentle. You can't give me fifteen at tennis and I could dance you into exhaustion."

"There'll be no tennis, there'll be no dancing in China," he said.

"But there'll be we," she told him.

"There won't be we. Don't you see what you're making me do, Martha? I want you so much that now, knowing you care for me, I can't bear to let you go. Yet I can't bear to let you share the life that I must lead. And I don't want to be weak, Martha. And I know that if I saw you doing menial work—I'd become weak. And there'd be menial work. You can't imagine what it will be like in Tai Ping. No companionship, no luxuries—my God, not even the decent conveniences which we think are essential to life. You'd go mad."

"But I *am* mad," she retorted. "I've thought it over——"

"You've done nothing of the sort," he interrupted. "You're acting on an impulse and I won't permit it."

"Is it gallant to refuse a lady's prayer?" she asked mischievously.

"Don't be gay; you only make it harder for me."

"And I shall continue making it harder for you until you give in. You say it's an impulse; perhaps you're right. But it's a decent impulse. And at the same time it's a self-ish impulse. Peter, I just can't live without you and I'm not going to try. I'm not a fool. I know the things to which I am used aren't easy to give up. I know that when we're off in China, thousands of miles from the life I've led and loved, there will be black moments, black days, black months perhaps. But if I let you go without me those black months will begin tonight, and I don't know when

they'll lighten or if they ever will. But in China, there'll be you, and even in the moments I hate you because you let me do this mad thing, I'll adore you, too, because you let me do it.

"I'm a woman, Pete. I'm a human being. Those two things mean that I'm changeable and flighty and not certain of myself most of the time. I'll change my mind half a dozen times this morning, but when you take that train this afternoon, Pete, you'll find that I'll be with you. Human beings aren't perfect. They hate those whom they choose to hold responsible for their entanglements. There are going to be times, Pete, when I'll actually hate you. You can't love as much as I know I can love without being able to hate, for a little while, the thing I love. You'll have to be patient with me. You'll have to realize that while your call to service buoys you up above hardship and disappointment, I will have only my love for you and your love for me. If we were to move down to Long Island and you were to establish a fashionable practice, I could promise you, in deep sincerity, that while I might be occasionally petulant I would never be angry, never nag, never be a weight upon you.

"But in the life we're going to lead, under the conditions we're going to live, I can't promise any of those things. I'm going to miss bridge, and the theaters, and gay week-ends, and dances, and nicely appointed things. I wouldn't be human if I didn't miss them, and I'd be a liar if I told you I wouldn't miss them, and our life is to start with no

lie, Pete. It won't be easy; I expect to shed oceans of tears. But I expect to love you until I die. Pete, are you taking me with you?"

He looked at her.

"I'm not going to kiss you, Martha, though I'm not afraid of the people outside who can see us through the window, or of the people in the hotel lobby here. I'm not going to touch your hand. I'm going down to the railroad station. I'm going to get a drawing room to Chicago, and another one from Chicago to Seattle. Then I'm going to find a minister. I'm going to ask him to marry us. I'm going to see the railroad company's insurance adjuster. The railroad has been very kind. A man saw me this morning, to tell me that any cash I needed would be given me at once to replace my effects. They would waive formalities. I'll need that cash to buy another outfit in Chicago in the few hours I'll be there. I have a very few thousand dollars in the bank, but we can get a check cashed in Chicago to buy things for you. My train leaves at three o'clock. Between now and two you'll have to think. If you feel as you say you do, it wouldn't be fair to kiss you, not fair to either of us. Neither of us would think clearly if we kissed. So I'm going to walk out of here. I'll come back at two with everything ready for our marriage. I want you to spend these next few hours in thinking. I don't want you to let your emotions race away with you. If you tell me at two that you do not care enough to share my life I shall be disappointed beyond my power to ex-

press, but not disappointed in you, Martha, for I will know that you have decided what is best for both of us. And if what is best means lifelong loneliness for me, I shall nevertheless accept it as the final decision of the loveliest girl I shall ever know. And if you decide to go with me, we'll go to the court house and get our license. The minister will be waiting; we'll be married at once and take the train.

"No, don't say a single word. I want you to make your decision after I've gone."

He rose abruptly and walked out of the hotel. She stumbled toward the stairs that led to her room. Through the plate glass window she saw him on the sidewalk. He looked pathetic with the bandage about his head, in his soiled and shabby clothes. She touched her fingers to her lips and threw a kiss in his direction.

The clerk at the desk saw the tender message wafted and grinned. What a sap that bandaged guy was to be leaving her. Let a jane as good-looking as this one blow kisses to him, the clerk, and he wouldn't be walking down Main Street. Oh, well, all guys weren't alike, and perhaps it was just as well.

Martha went to her room. She picked up the Buffalo papers which had been left at her door this morning. She tried to read the account of the wreck of yesterday but all she saw was the recurring name of Dr. Peter Baxter. She put the paper down and stared out the window.

Tai Ping. The very name connoted remoteness, strangeness, loneliness. And Bert Cranston, proud though he

might be, would still be glad to take her. It would be pleasant being married to Bert. That routine of life which until recently she had not thought she could live without was a delightful routine. Even if one's husband left one occasionally for trips of exploration, there would be the excitement of his goings and the joy of his returns. If one loved him.

But did one love a person, or did one love the things for which that person stood? But that couldn't be so, for she didn't love China, didn't love Pete's profession.

But Pete had spoken of impulse. Could this be true? Was there glamor about him because he was different from the other men she knew? But, in a way, Bert was different from other men, and yet he had not the glamor of Pete. No, it wasn't impulse, unless love itself were an impulse.

She leaned back in a chair and closed her eyes. She saw herself set down in the heart of China, surrounded by jabbering, dirty natives. She visualized the long months, the years even, when the only person with whom she could exchange speech would be Pete.

Would she be bored with him? The question was absurd; of course she'd be bored with him, just exactly as she would hate him occasionally. But had she the fineness of character, the endurance of soul to survive the trials and the hardships of life with him?

But who could answer that? She hoped she could endure it. Certainly, if one loved with passion, one should give that love a chance to find out how durable it was. If

one refrained from the great adventure, how could one know whether or not one were fitted for adventure?

The telephone in her room jangled sharply. She glanced at her watch. Hours had passed; it was two o'clock; she hadn't even thought to order luncheon. She trembled so that she was barely able to walk across the room to the telephone. The instrument shook in her hand as she lifted it from a table.

"Martha? I'm downstairs."

"Why, Pete, I've forgotten to pack my bag."

She heard him chuckle.

"What a wonderful helpmeet you'll be for a missionary doctor. You know, you'll have to mix my medicines, and if you forget them——"

"I suppose you'll scold," she laughed.

"Scold? Don't be silly. A few patients will die, that's all."

"I'll pack the bag in two minutes," she promised.

In the middle of her packing she stopped and laughed aloud. What had he said? That he wouldn't scold but that a few patients would die. Oh, perhaps it wasn't the brightest witticism ever uttered, but it was gay, just as he was gay. He might have a mission, might feel himself called to service, but never would he lose the gaiety that went with his red hair, his freckles, his blue eyes. She made a little prayer, that God would never let her lose her gaiety, either. She snapped the lock of her bag. She must remember to wire Mrs. Gray to send her things in-

stantly to Seattle. She must send wires to Trudie, to all her friends. She must go downstairs at once. The train left in an hour.

The clerk at the desk saw her approach the bandaged hero of the wreck. This time she didn't blow a kiss to Pete. Their lips met in full view of whoever cared to observe.

"Not such a sap after all, that guy," said the clerk to himself.

Which was, perhaps, a perfectly good substitute for rice and old shoes.

THE END

CARDS • GIFTS • RENTAL LIBRARY

**MARRIAN'S
WESTLAKE GIFT SHOP**

Telephone
DRexel 0314

2106 West 7th St.
Los Angeles, Calif.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 125 029 9

